

Christians and Antichrists, Part 1

1 John 2:18

62-18

We are in a study on Sunday nights, the epistle called 1 John, the first epistle of John. I invite you to turn in your Bible, if you don't have one there's one in the pew nearby, to the second chapter. Tremendous truth is available for us in this little epistle. Brief as it is, it is loaded. Looking forward as we work through the series to enriching my own understanding of this epistle in preparation for writing the commentary on, in fact, 1, 2 and 3 John as well. It was many years ago that I first taught this here and have been very thrilled to go back through it in a much richer fashion. And I hope you've been blessed as well.

We come in our study to chapter 2 verses 18 and following and I've titled this, "Christians and Antichrists," because that really does sum up the issue here. And for tonight we're going to focus, at least to begin with, on this matter of Antichrist. Let me begin reading in verse 18 and read a little bit of the section.

"Children, it is the last hour and just as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have arisen. From this we know that it is the last hour."

And then down in verse 22, "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. This is the Antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father. The one who confesses the Son has the Father also."

Now without needing to go into all of the rest of what's in this wonderful section, we can sort of focus, to begin with, on this matter of Antichrist, a term that has become very familiar to Christians in this generation, as I'm sure in many other generations. The word Antichrist is well known to us. It occurs in the New Testament only in John's letters. It occurs in 1 John several times, and then it occurs in the seventh verse of 2 John. And though it is limited as a term to John's epistles, it expresses a widely known reality that is dealt with in other portions of the Bible, not only in the New Testament but even in the Old Testament as well. The term "Antichrist" which John uses is *antichristos* in the Greek. *Christos* obviously means Christ, *antichristos* can have two possible meanings. It is a Greek preposition that can mean either against or in the place of...against or in the place of. Antichrist can then mean either someone who is against Christ, or someone who seeks to replace Christ. Someone who is an adversary of Christ, or someone who is a false representation of Christ. We can take it then to mean the one who opposes Christ. In that case, the opposition is clear, it is plain. Or we can take it to mean one who seeks to be put in the place of Christ and then the opposition becomes more subtle and more disguised. And antichrist can mean either of those, or both. We don't need to choose between them. Clearly antichrist is one on some fronts who is openly and overtly against Christ. That is to say they speak lies concerning Christ, such as in verse 22 that I just read. They deny that Jesus is the Christ, a denial of the nature and identity and work of Jesus Christ. This is

clearly an antichrist perspective.

Over in chapter 4 verse 3 John writes, "Every spirit that does not confess Jesus...that is, does not agree with what the Bible says about Jesus...is not from God and this is of the antichrist." This is the nature of the antichrist, or the spirit, or the attitude of the antichrist which you have heard that it is coming and now it is already in the world. It because it is an attitude, it is a spirit. Anyone who possesses any kind of opposition to Christ has the antichrist spirit.

In 2 John, I mentioned earlier, verse 7 John says, "Many deceivers are gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, this is the deceiver and the antichrist." Anyone who has an aberrant view of Christ as to the nature of Christ, as to the deity of Christ, or the humanity of Christ, is an antichrist. Anyone who attacks Christ. But it is not just limited to those who assault Christ. That's the emphasis that John makes, but that's not a limitation by any means because there are also those who put themselves in the place of Christ. For example, in Mark 13 and verse 22 where Jesus says, "For false Christs, pseudo Christs, and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders in order if possible to lead the elect astray." Matthew 24 talks about the same thing. There are and always has been and will be in the future pseudo Christs, false Christs, those who impersonate Christ as well as those who attack Christ. The ones who attack, as I said, are clear and open. The ones who impersonate are more subtle. And, of course, impersonating Christ is an attack on Christ.

Now go back to our text for a moment in 1 John chapter 2 and verse 18. "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."

The last hour is here identified twice, at the beginning and the end of the verse. We can know it's the last hour because of the proliferation of antichrists. It isn't the last hour until you have antichrists. It isn't the last hour until you have opposition to Christ. It isn't the last hour until you have false claimants to messiahship. It isn't the last hour until that happens. When that happens you know it's the last hour. And you know that finally THE Antichrist is coming. And so this verse is very helpful for us. We know it's the last hour because we've heard that the final Antichrist is coming, we know it's the last hour because already many antichrists have arisen.

Now let's talk about that for a moment. The Bible is clear that one man will be the final, most complete and powerful Antichrist. He will appear in the future history of the world in a time which is called the time of the Tribulation. This is a time that will end man's day. It is a time, a seven-year period of time divided into two three-and-half year sections in which Satan releases his power in the world, at the same time God releases judgment in the world. And there will be in that day a world ruler who is identified as the Antichrist. He is the culminating and final one, that's why we have here the singular "Antichrist is coming."

And I think most Christians know about the Antichrist that is coming. In fact, throughout the history of the church there's been a lot of discussion about that, a lot of study and even some speculation who that Antichrist might be. But he is not the only Antichrist. He is just the final one. He is just sort of the apex, the culmination, the last in a long line of antichrists that are also here in the last hour, many antichrists have already arisen. At the time John wrote this, of course, it was just the end of the first

century. It had only been about well 60 years since Christ had come and so the last hour had only just begun 60 years before because the last hour is to be associated with the arrival of Messiah, as I'll show you in a moment. And already in that first period of 60 years many antichrists had already arisen. That is to say already there was rampant opposition to Jesus Christ as well as pseudo messiahs trying to call attention to themselves as the true Messiah.

We learn then what we read earlier in chapter 2 to be the case and also in chapter 4 that this Antichrist concept is an attitude. It is a spirit. It is a way of thinking. It is not just one person, it is not just many persons, it is an attitude toward Christ that personifies itself finally in one person, but in the meantime in many persons. Any person who is against Christ, any person who attacks the deity of Jesus Christ, any person who is hostile to the true nature of Christ, His deity and His humanity, to the true work of Christ is possessing the spirit of antichrist. Any person who offers himself as the true Christ, the true representative of God against Christ, calling attention to himself as if he were the true Christ and Christ is not is the spirit of antichrist.

So you can think of antichrist not so much as a person, but as a force, as an attitude that incarnates itself or incarcerates itself in people in every generation since Christ first came. Anybody and everybody who is against Christ, anybody and everybody who rejects Christ, they don't have to be false prophets, they don't have to be false messiahs, they don't have to be false teachers, all that is required to possess the spirit of antichrist is to be against Christ. To John this was simply another way to describe a non-believer. This is another way to describe a Christ-rejecter. Certainly it embraced false teachers and false christs. Certainly it embraced them. But it was not limited to them. Anyone who rejected Christ and in particular those who had known about Christ and having been told the truth about Christ rejected Him, therefore bore the name antichrist in a more direct way because they having heard of Christ, heard the gospel of Christ, took up a position against Christ. Anyone in that posture is an antichrist. Yes...as Mark 13:6 said...Jesus said, "Many shall come in My name saying I am Christ. And they'll deceive many." There are fewer of those who actually claimed to be Christ, but they're around, but there are many who are against Christ, who reject Christ.

So John says, "Look, I'm trying to distinguish here who is a believer and who is not." Throughout this epistle he is giving us tests, tests by which we could measure who is a true believer and who is not. And there are doctrinal tests and the doctrinal tests surround two areas. One, your own evaluation of sin, that is they have a sort of anthropological test to evaluate the sinfulness of man, and then the Christological test is to evaluate Christ. So if you want to know who is a Christian, you will test them on this basis. Do they have a true view of sin and a true view of Christ? Those are the doctrinal tests. And then we've also been learning that I guess we could call them has traditionally been the term moral tests, not just doctrinal tests, but true Christians are known because they have a right view of man as sinful and depraved, and a right view of Christ as the God/Man the Savior and the Redeemer, but they also can be tested on the moral level because if they are true believers their lives will be marked by two things...love for Christ and love for others and obedience to the Word of God. John also has thrown in, "They will love Christ, they will love others, and they will not love the world as we have seen."

So as we come in to verse 18, John cycles us back through these things all the way through his epistle, we move back in to the doctrinal test and the issue becomes Jesus Christ. True Christians confess Christ. And as I noted for you, he will say this again and again. As we saw down in chapter 2 verse 22 and over in chapter 4 verse 3, the doctrinal test involves a true assessment of who Jesus

Christ is. True Christians confess Christ. False ones deny Him. They are antichrists. So the distinction is between Christians who affirm the truth about Christ and antichrists who do not.

And John is always the master of contrast, isn't he? He's already contrasted light and darkness in chapter 1. He's contrasted love and hate in chapter 2. Again he's contrasted the family of God with the world in verses 15 to 17. And now he contrasts the struggle between truth and error regarding Christ. Those who have the true concerning Christ, and those who do not. John then presents the difference between Christians and non-Christians as having to do with their understanding of Jesus Christ. To say this is obvious but it needs to be said, a wrong view of Christ is the fastest path to damnation.

So let's talk about the antichrist concept tonight a little bit in verse 18. Let's look at the verse. "Children, *paidia*, children," used in verse 13 where he says, "I've written to you, children, because you know the Father." So there is the same word. We can assume then that he's talking to those who know the Father. Those who are children in the spiritual sense, they're babes, you remember back there that the children don't know much but they do know the Lord, they know the basics, and so he's writing to assist spiritual children with this very important understanding. "Children, you need to learn you are living in the last hour. It is the last hour. It is the last hour, you need to know that." And the order of the Greek is emphatic, "Children, last hour, *hora*, it is." Greek always places things in the sentence in order to lay the emphasis where it wants it laid. And that's why in the Greek it says, "Children, last hour it is!"

Well what does this mean the last hour? This is like two thousand years ago. What is this talking about?

Well as we have pointed out numerous times in the study of the New Testament, the last times, the last hour began when Jesus arrived. There's only two ages outlined for us in the New Testament. There is the present age and the age to come. The present age and the age to come. The present age is an evil age. Galatians 1:4 Paul characterizes it as evil. It is the age then from the beginning of evil to the end of evil. The present age is this evil age. That's what Paul calls it, this present evil age. The age dominated by evil. We're in it, all of humanity has been in it since the Fall. The age to come is the Kingdom when righteousness will prevail in the world and Christ will rule with a rod of iron, the great Millennial Kingdom, the thousand-year reign of Christ that's promised in the Old Testament, promised in the New Testament and described for us in the end of the book of Revelation. So you have the present age which is an evil age. You have the age to come which is the age of prevailing righteousness under the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.

John says it is the last hour of this present evil age. It is the last hour of this age in which we live. How do we know it is the last hour? Because Messiah has come. And the prophet said that Messiah would come at the end of man's day, that He would come to set up His Kingdom, to set up the age to come. The Old Testament prophets, the Old Testament writers didn't know there would be a several thousand years between the original arrival of Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom, that was not disclosed to them. Although it was disclosed to them in places such as Isaiah 53 that the Messiah would die and rise again, there was nothing in the Old Testament to demonstrate to them with any clarity this lengthy period of millennia between the arrival of Messiah and the establishment of the age to come. We are in this present evil age but we have this marvelous privilege of living in the last hour of this present evil age, living at a time when the end of the age has actually come and

been inaugurated by the arrival of Jesus Christ.

This, just in case you need some passages to sort of undergird this, you remember that in the fourth chapter of Galatians and the fourth verse, "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son." It was in God's perfect timing when the exact moment came that He sent forth His Son, this really sort of inaugurated the fullness of time. This is the final chapter in human history. This brings this present evil age to its culmination, the arrival of Messiah. In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 11 it talks about the Old Testament. It says, "Now these things happened to them, in the Old Testament, as an example they were written for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come." We then are living in the fullness of time, the end of the age, just other ways to express the last hour. Hebrews chapter 1, "God...verse 1...after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions in many ways," that's Old Testament, God spoke long ago to the fathers through the prophets in many portions, in many ways, "In these last days has spoken to us in His Son." With the arrival of the Son is inaugurated the last days. We are then living in the last days. In fact, for us today we're two thousand years into the last days. In fact, in Hebrews 9:26 it says, "Christ now once at the consummation of the ages has been manifested." Christ was manifested at a time called the fullness, the consummation, the last days.

Peter understood that. First Peter 1:20, "He appeared in these last times for your sake." And 1 Peter 4:7, again, "The end of all things is at hand." We're living at the end of the present evil age. The last times, as I said, have been going on for two thousand years.

How do we know it's the last times? People have a right to ask that question. How do we know we're living at the end of the age? How do we know this is the last days of this present evil age? How do we know that?

Go back to your text in 1 John chapter 2, it couldn't be more clear. "Children, it is the last hour." How do we know that? "Just as you heard that antichrist is coming, he is a feature of the last hour, even now many antichrists have arisen from this we know that it is the last hour." Anybody ever ask you, are we at the end of human history? Tell them yes and take them to that verse. You can't have antichrists until you have Christ, and as soon as you have Christ, you have antichrist and that identifies that we're living in the last hour.

The Jews even knew this. They knew that the end of the present evil age would be the arrival of Messiah. Messiah would come and bring a kingdom of righteousness and glory. They knew that knowledge would fill the earth and peace and Messiah would reign, righteousness would prevail. And so we know that when the Messiah came, when the Lord Jesus came, He inaugurated the last hour of this present evil age. With Christ came antichrist and the opposition didn't take very long to form, did it? It didn't take very long to form. He announced His messiahship and three years later they crucified Him on a cross and launched the antichrist spirit which has continued to flourish in this two thousand year period.

In fact, one of the great proofs that Jesus is the Messiah is the antichrist spirit. Jesus Christ is the most loved person who ever walked on this earth, and the most hated...and the most hated. There is so much opposition to Christ that He has to be the Messiah. The dominant world attitude that is against Jesus Christ, that resents Him, that hates Him when He's truly presented and represented,

that dominant world attitude is proof that He's Messiah, that it is the last days and He indeed is the true Messiah.

So to be simple about John's eschatology, he says, "Look, you have heard that antichrist is coming, and I'm telling you there are already many antichrists." Let's talk about the antichrist for a minute. "You have heard that the antichrist is coming." How have they heard that? How did they know there was going to be a final antichrist if in fact the word doesn't appear anywhere except in John's epistle? This is the first New Testament mention of the term antichrist here. But John says you already know about him. You already know about him. Because he has a lot of other names, how would they know about him? How would these people know about him?

Well, if they knew the Old Testament they would know about him because he is very, very carefully presented in the book of Daniel chapter 7, chapter 8, chapter 11. But even more than that, John writes his epistle in the nineties of the first century, some time in the nineties, dying I think around 96 he wrote his epistles as well as receive his revelation at the end of his life. This then is at least 40 years after the writing of 2 Thessalonians. These are believers who very likely knew the contents of 2 Thessalonians. And in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians written in about 51 or 52 A.D., there is a very clear presentation of this coming antichrist though that's not the name that's given to him, it is clearly the one in view. And we're going to look at that tonight to see what it says about him and what they knew and what we need to know.

But before we do that, let's finish off at least a look at the verse. "Even now many antichrists have risen." The final antichrist is not solitary figure. He is just the final one in a long line of antichrists. Anyone in opposition to Christ, as I said, anyone who offers himself as a false replacement to Christ fits the term...false Christs, false prophets are going to be around, pseudo Christs are going to be around and so are those who attack and assault Christ. The world is full of antichrists, full. Any liberal theologian who denies the deity of Christ possesses the spirit of antichrist. Charles Manson in his bizarre demonic attempt to identify himself as Christ manifests the more bizarre spirit of antichrist. Anyone who attacks the deity or the humanity or the work of Jesus Christ is antichrist. And all of that is going to culminate in the final antichrist. That's one of the reasons we know we're in the last hour.

Let's look for a moment at this final antichrist. Turn over to 2 Thessalonians because I want to follow up on what John writes, "Just as you heard that antichrist is coming." They would have heard that because they would have had opportunity to be exposed to the material in 2 Thessalonians. Now without going into all of this, and that's a strong temptation for me since I've been working on 1 and 2 Thessalonians now for months and months and just this week received the First and Second Thessalonian commentary, so I've been writing this commentary and I'm prone to draw all the things that are in my mind, I'll try to restrain myself. But anyway, 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 3, "Let no one in any way deceive you, it will not come." What will not come? The day of the Lord, chapter 2 verse 2, the day of the Lord mentioned there, the day of the Lord. Some of the Thessalonians were afraid the day of the Lord had already come, they were suffering a lot, there was a lot of persecution. They thought they had missed the Rapture of the church and they were now stuck in the day of the Lord and they were feeling the heat of divine judgment. And so Paul is saying, "Look, the day of the Lord has not come. The day of the Lord has not come, and don't let anyone tell you it has." Verse 3, "Because it won't come until the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition or the son of destruction."

Here we are introduced to the antichrist under the title, "The man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, or the son of destruction." Further referred to down in verse 8, "That lawless one will be revealed." It goes on to say the Lord will slay him. Verse 9 identifies him as the coming one, in accord with the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders, with all deception of wickedness for those who perish. Clearly Paul is saying you can't be in the day of the Lord, you can't be in that judgment because the lawless one hasn't come, the son of destruction hasn't come and he hasn't committed the apostasy.

Now let's just take that term "apostasy" for a minute because that's how he starts the discussion. The day of the Lord won't come until the apostasy, the *apostasía*. Short definition, the revolt, the rebellion. It is so used in Joshua 22:22 in the Septuagint of a rebellion against God. A longer definition, short definition-revolt, rebellion; longer definition, a deliberate abandonment of a formerly professed position, a defection, a deliberate abandonment of a formerly professed position. It's a defection. But it's not just a general defection, it's not just a general abandonment of God or of Christ, the kind that you would expect to see in the church as people come and go and shallowly believe and then defect. This is not an apostasy, or this is not general apostasy, this is THE apostasy.

There will be defection. There will be always through the history of the church Laodicean churches that have a superficial identification with Jesus Christ but He spews them out of His mouth. There will be those churches who leave the true faith. There will be escalating defection from the truth as time goes on. Churches that once held to the truth will be led astray, they will be seduced by demons. First Timothy 4, "In the latter times, times we're living in, the end of the present evil age, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits, doctrines of demons, lying hypocrites, seared in their own conscience will lead them astray," and so forth. In 2 Timothy 3 he talks about the same thing, there will be a turning away from the truth, there will be a drifting away from the truth, from the reality of the gospel among those who profess Christianity. Peter writes about that, 2 Peter, "False teachers will come and people will abandon the truth." Jude writes about it, Jude 17 and 18, "Defectors." That's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about some sort of general flow of apostasy, he's not talking about churches that abandon what they once believed or Christianity in general defecting in some kind of a sort of general overall decline, although that definitely will be the case. There will be a general defection. There will be a decline. There will be a Christianity that has literally lost its trust in the faith and exists only in name. He doesn't have that kind of general idea in mind, although that is reality.

He's talking here about THE apostasy. This is an event. This is an identifiable unique event. He's saying, "The day of the Lord can't be here because THE apostasy hasn't happened." And he identifies THE apostasy as coming first and being led by the man of lawlessness, being revealed this son of destruction. There's an event that has to happen. There's a climactic act of apostasy. There's a climactic revolt. There's a climactic rebellion that's going to take place. This man of lawlessness, this man of sin, it's actually *anomia*, lawlessness. This man who lives without regard for God's Law. This man who openly defies God's Law, who openly defies God's rule. This is a man of sin because all sin is lawlessness, 1 John 3:4. There have always been millions of lawless people, the whole human race. There's always been millions of blasphemers and God-rejecting and Christ-hating people through history since Christ came. There are many who feigned an interest in God, feigned an interest in Christianity and defected. But this is THE apostasy led by THE man of lawlessness and THE son of destruction. This is emphatic. Points to a definite time, a definite event done by a definite individual. This is the final and ultimate apostasy by the man of lawlessness, son of destruction.

That's an interesting term. Man of sin, or man of lawlessness is sort of his own approach. He is lawless, God-defying, has no regard for the Law of God. That's his own title. He will take God on in flagrant revolt and rebellion and disobedience. But God's title for him is Son of Destruction. That is an old Hebrew way to speak meaning he is one headed for destruction, he is doomed for destruction. He literally is the Son of Destruction to say it is part of the fabric of who he is. When you're the son of somebody, you bear their image. He bears the image of destruction. He carries the spiritual genes of destruction. He belongs to destruction by nature, like a son belongs to his father by nature. He belongs to hell and he belongs to torment and he belongs to *apoleia*, he belongs to perdition. This is a man of ruin, human trash for the dump of hell. By the way, Son of Perdition only a title given only one other person in the Bible, do you remember who it was? Judas, John 17:12, Jesus called him a Son of Perdition. And Judas was controlled by Satan, John 13:2, "Satan entered into him." And the Antichrist is controlled by Satan, Revelation 13 says, "Satan is the power behind him." So the Hebraism here, Son of Destruction, means he who is destined to be destroyed, he who is destined to be destroyed.

Now they would have known about him. As I said, they would have known about him from Daniel. They would have known that Daniel wrote about him, as I said, Daniel 7, Daniel 8 and Daniel 11. They might have known about him, and here's a little more obscure passage you might find interesting, Zechariah. You know, Zechariah looked at the future in his marvelous prophecy. Years ago I did a verse-by-verse exposition of Zechariah, one of the most wonderful experiences I've had in doing exposition. Not an easy book, but a rich, rich book. Zechariah 11:16, "Behold, I'm going to raise up a shepherd," the Lord says, "I'm going to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for the perishing. He will not seek the scattered. He will not heal the broken. He will not sustain the one standing but will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hooves." That's some shepherd. Huh..., "Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock, a sword will be on his arm and on his right eye. His arm will be totally withered, his right eye will be blind."

God says...and you know, that's all in the context of Zechariah which is looking at the end of the age when the Messiah comes and the Jews look on Him whom they've pierced and they mourn for Him and a fountain of cleansing is opened to them, and salvation comes, and the Kingdom comes, and that's all at the end of Zechariah. But at that time God is going to raise up a shepherd opposite the Good Shepherd, this is the bad shepherd, this is the evil shepherd. He doesn't visit those that are in pain and those that are dying. He has no regard for the scattered. He has no care for the broken. No sympathy for the standing. He is no shepherd, he rather slaughters his sheep to fill his insatiable satisfied hunger, but he is doomed. His arm represents his strength, his eye represents his intelligence, and God is going to destroy his strength and destroy his intelligence when God's sword of vengeance falls upon him. That's why he is a son of destruction because he himself is devoted to destruction.

Now with that in mind, go back to 2 Thessalonians again. They would have known about this antichrist, this lawless one, this false shepherd from Zechariah, from Daniel. And you'll have to read the passages in Daniel, they're rather lengthy. They would have known about him as well from this wonderful epistle of Paul. Now what is this apostasy event? Verse 3 says that the day of the Lord won't happen, the day of the Lord's final judgment in the establishment of His Kingdom won't happen until this apostasy occurs under the man of sin, under the son of destruction, what is it? Verse 4 describes it, here is the event. "Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God." There is Antichrist in action, both in opposition to the true Christ and offering himself as this pseudo Christ.

Verse 4 describes the big event, the great apostasy.

What we're looking for then in the future is the coming of what Daniel calls the willful king...the willful king. And he comes to do his own will. And he does this amazing act in which he opposes and exalts himself above all other gods, he is the ultimate egotist and you read about him in Daniel 7, 8 and 11 in regard to that. This is not an abstraction, this is not some kind of movement. This is not a system of evil. This is not Caligula, this is not Nero, this is not Antiochus Epiphanes, if it is, as some would have us believe, then the day of the Lord is already over because the day of the Lord doesn't come until this comes first. This is not Satan, verse 9, it's in accord with the activity of Satan, but it's not Satan. This man is human, this man is earthly. This man comes into the Middle East, is described by Daniel, and reeks havoc and slaughter. This man is satanically controlled but he is the ultimate evil genius, superior intellectually, superior oratorically, superior militarily, superior economically. He becomes the leader of the world. He offers himself as the world's Savior, if you will, the world's Messiah, the world's deliverer. So convincing is he as the Christ and the Messiah that Daniel 9 says the nation Israel signs a pact with him to be their Savior, their Messiah and their protector. He puts himself above every God, every object of worship. He at first is supportive...apparently supportive of religion, for a while he tolerates religion. And then he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. He goes right into the temple, that tells you they'll be a rebuilt temple in the time of the Tribulation, he goes right into the *naos*, right into the sanctuary, right into the innermost part of the temple and he puts himself on the throne, exhibiting himself as if he is God. He moves into the rebuilt temple which for the Jews in the time of the Tribulation will still symbolize the presence of God, the presence of Jehovah and he says that he's God, he is the true God, the true Christ. So it's an act of deification. This is THE apostasy, this is THE rebellion. And from then on when he does that then everybody in the world has to worship him. There isn't any option for anybody, everybody has to worship him...everybody...everybody. He is described in the seventeenth chapter of Revelation, in fact much about what he does is described in that seventeenth chapter of Revelation, you'd find it very instructive to read through that chapter.

In the first three and a half years, if you study eschatology, the first three and a half years of the Tribulation he makes peace, he conquers without a sword, he's the rider on the white horse in Revelation 6. He comes with a bow without a sword. He comes to conquer peaceably, maybe by intimidation and the appearance of power. Makes a pact with Israel. But at midpoint, at the midpoint of that three and a half years, he commits what Daniel 9:27 calls the abomination of desolation, the abomination of just desolation. Jesus referred to it in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew chapter 24, verse 15 talks about the abomination of desolation, when this man who has reached power in the world where he's the world's Messiah and the world's leader, then moves in and calls himself Christ, calls himself God and that is the final and ultimate apostasy. This is the supreme blasphemy of the final Antichrist.

Just to give you that in the very words of our Lord, go back to Matthew chapter 24 and just a couple of verses will suffice. Verse 15, "When you see the abomination of desolation," as described through Daniel the prophet, Daniel 9:27 which is described in the ninth chapter of Daniel as an act perpetrated by this Antichrist with whom Israel has signed a pact of protection, believing him to be their Messiah, "But when you see the abomination of desolation, when you see him exalt himself, go into the temple of God, set himself up as God, standing in the holy place." But when he goes in and does this, then you better run, verse 16, "You better run. If you're in Judea flee, if you're on the top

of your house, which is where the patios were, don't go down to get anything, just get out of there. If you're out in the field, don't go back to get your coat at the house, if you happen to be with child pregnant, or be nursing babies, woe to you because you're not going to be able to run fast enough because once he establishes himself as God, and his intolerance then begins, he's going to massacre anybody and everybody and there will be a great tribulation," that means that this event will happen at the half-way point and it launches the second half of the seven years, the three and a half years known as Great Tribulation. And trouble is going to come such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now or ever shall be. The three and a half years of the worst trouble the world has ever known. And if it weren't cut short and limited to three and a half years, verse 22 says, nobody would survive, nobody. God protects the elect by shortening the time. It's a horrifying time, horrifying time. And it's triggered by this abomination of desolations. That which abominates, that is that which mocks or blasphemes God.

Abomination denotes an act of disgust or an act of revolution, or an act of abhorrence. It indicates things that are gross and blasphemous. That's what he's going to do. And when he sets up his power, you better run, he says, because the bloodshed is going to begin.

Another fascinating view of the Antichrist is in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation. Turn over there, if you will. Since John introduced him to us just in name, I thought we ought to know a little bit about him, so John [means Revelation] 13, in the vision that John has here, the Antichrist appears as a beast. "He stood on the sand of the seashore and," speaking about the dragon, Satan, who is referred to in the prior verse, and then John writes, "And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea," and that is identified in very strange fashion, "having ten horns and seven heads and on his horns were ten diadems and on his heads were blasphemous names."

Here he comes. The raging sea, the mass of humanity, the nations. And out of them comes this beast, this is a frightening figure, a treacherous deadly figure with crowns and horns and heads and each of them with a name of blasphemy, describing features and aspects of his wretched, wicked, sovereign rule. Horns denote power. Crowns denote dominion. This is the ruler of the world. This is the ultimate ruler. And he's also identified not only with all the heads and horns and all of that blasphemies, but he has great strength. He is pictured in verse 2 like a leopard, like a bear, like a lion. Back in Daniel chapter 7 also, verses 3 to 8, he's sort of the composite rising of the fierceness of Babylon, the strength of Medo-Persia and the speed of Greece now in a final form in the final world empire. "I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, verse 3, and his fatal wound was healed and the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast." He revives the old Roman Empire, as it were, pulls together a unified Europe very apparently and causes the whole world to worship him. I don't think he rises from the dead, only one of his heads was slain, it doesn't say that he himself was slain. Some would say he's a resurrected being. Satan can't resurrect people from the dead. I don't think that's what it's saying. I think he is a resurrection of the great Empire that was Rome and all those details are in my Revelation commentary if you want to dig into them a little bit.

The whole earth is so amazed they follow after the beast. They worshiped the dragon, so he leads them into Satan worship because it was the dragon who gave the authority to the beast and they worshiped the beast also saying, "Who is like the beast and who is able to wage war with him?" Everybody capitulates, he goes in, he abominates the temple of God. He sets himself up as God. You better run for your life because the first people he's coming after are the Jews and he's going to massacre them. He feigned to be your Messiah, he's going to turn out to be your executioner, you

better run and you better run fast because you're going to be vulnerable to him. The whole world is going to roll over under the power of this man and he's going to follow after him, they're going to worship him, they're going to worship the devil himself. In verse 5, this is going to go on, it says, because there is given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies. He's not at all subtle about his blasphemy but he's going to be given authority by God to speak and to act for 42 months, three and a half years...three and a half years. Constant unending flow of blasphemy is going to come out of his mouth for three and a half years as he blasphemes the true God, the true Christ. Verse 7, "Wherever he finds the saints, the believers, people who will believe..." By the way, during the time of Tribulation people will believe, the gospel will be preached by two witnesses, preached by the 144 thousand Jews, preached by an angel flying through heaven, all of that is in Revelation. There will be a mass of people who believe the gospel from every tongue, tribe, and nation and those who believe are going to be the target of the Antichrist. He's going to make war with them. He's going to overcome them. Authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him by God, by the way. God is going to give him the authority to be His instrument of judgment. "And all who dwell...in verse 8...all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb who has been slain." If you're not one of the Lamb's, you will worship him. The whole world goes after him. The whole world. Really amazing.

Powerful final Antichrist, horrible creature, energized and empowered and indwelt by Satan himself. Turns the whole world into Satan worshipers. Tries to massacre the Jews. And you remember that God protects them, protects them down in the desert so that they're preserved to come to faith in Christ and enter into the Kingdom. Then he goes after the saints and many of them are martyred. You remember in the sixth chapter of the book of Revelation you have the martyrs that have been slaughtered during the Tribulation, under the altar praying to God and saying, "How long are You going to allow the slaughter to go on before You call a halt? How long are You going to allow the Antichrist to do what he's doing?" As he makes war with the saints. This is another glimpse of this same figure who is coming.

Now you can return, if you will, to 2 Thessalonians. We just need to wrap up our look at that section. And I want you to just notice down in verse 5, Paul sort of picks up this same theme that John picked up when he says, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you I was telling you these things." From the start of the church it appears that this was really important information. From the very beginning Paul's ministry to the Thessalonians, and we're very early here in the writing of Paul and the letters of Paul, from the very outset even before he wrote about the Antichrist he was telling people about the Antichrist. This is where world history is going, this is what's happening. The Messiah came, the spirit of Antichrist is already at work. It's going to culminate in a final Antichrist. So he says, "Do you not remember that while I was with you, I was telling you these things?" It's going to come, he's going to come.

John in writing, as we noted, says, "You know these things, you know them, you know them from the Old Testament, you know them from the epistle to the Thessalonians, you know them because they've been apostolic testimony." The reason he hasn't come yet, verse 6, "You know what restrains him now so that in his time he may be revealed." The final Antichrist isn't here, Paul says he's restrained, and you know what restrains him. It's amazing that he would say that because people say it's really hard to figure out what restrains him. Well there's only one thing that could restrain him, there's only one power that could restrain him and whose is that? God. The mystery of lawlessness,

that the unfolding of lawlessness is already at work, now we find it's not an it that restrains him, only He who now restrains will do so until He's taken out of the way. The restrainer is God. God, the Holy Spirit, likely, restrains the Antichrist from coming, restrains Satan from working his final evil until the time is right. The only power that could hold back Satan, the only power that could hold back this demonic evil, the only power who could hold back Antichrist to the perfect timing when God says it's going to happen, just 42 months before the day of the Lord explodes in its final fury on the world, the only power that's going to make sure that that timing is perfect is the power of God Himself. The man of sin can't come until God's time, until God's restraint is removed.

Then...verse 8 says...the lawless one will be revealed. And he won't have a very long career, "The Lord will slay him with the breath of His mouth." All God has to do is speak and he's dead. And by the way, in Revelation you can see that he gets cast into the Lake of Fire with the devil and all his angels. He'll be slain with the breath of His mouth and brought to an end by the appearance of Jesus Christ. The Antichrist gets slain when Jesus comes at the end of the Tribulation at the battle of Armageddon. Jesus comes, defeats the armies of the world that have gathered to war against Him under the leadership of Antichrist, He destroys and slays the Antichrist and the false prophet and casts them into the Lake of Fire.

Short career, but during that career, verses 9 and 10 say, he works according to the activity of Satan with all power and signs and false wonders, with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish because they didn't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. If you don't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved, then you are among those who can be deceived, you are deceived...you are deceived. In fact, God will even send a deluding influence so that people would believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in wickedness.

So, all that to say...let's go back to our text in John...all that to say Antichrist is coming. Antichrist is a horrible figure, horrible individual. You would think an almost solitary figure in human history, so blasphemous, steady stream of filthy blasphemy against God proceeds from his mouth for a three-and-a-half period. Does everything he can to wipe Israel out so that he can thwart under the influence of Satan the purposes of God for the nation Israel. Does everything he can to slaughter the saints who refuse to take his mark and refuse to worship him. Does everything he can to claim the world as his own and to claim the worship of the world for himself. He's the most anti-Christ, anti-God, he's the consummate figure in all of that. But the difference between him and somebody who rejects Jesus Christ is not a difference in quality, it's a difference only in quantity. That's the real point that John is making. As horrible as the Antichrist is, equally horrible without the same extent of influence is anybody who is against Christ...even now many antichrists have arisen. And that's how we know we're in the last hour.

We have to be in the last hour because Christ is so hated and so rejected. And the fact that there's so much animosity toward Jesus Christ, you heard the testimony of that girl who said the name of Jesus Christ made her shudder. There is so much hostility toward gospel truth, the biblical truth concerning Jesus Christ that He has to be the Messiah, He has to be because the world's venom is sent on Him. And so it will be in the end on the final Antichrist. He's not going to attack Buddha, or Mohammed, he's going to attack Christ and set himself up in Christ's place. It's frightening to think about the fact that a non-Christian is in terms of quality no different than this horrifying Antichrist. And so John has identified people who reject Jesus Christ in the most severe terms. Many antichrists are

now in the world. And if you don't believe in the true Christ, the God/Man believing He is who He is, believing in His work of salvation, His substitutionary death and resurrection, you possess the spirit of Antichrist, qualitatively no different than this final horrific figure who comes from the kingdom of darkness to be the ultimate blasphemer. Some of these antichrists get down in your own congregation. Verse 19, "They went out from us but they were not really of us." We had some antichrists around here who seemed to be interested in Jesus, but they also were apostate, they rebelled and revolted and left.

But we're different, verse 20, "You have an anointing from the Holy One, you all know, I haven't written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you know it...because you know it." Down in verse 23, "The one who confesses the Son has the Father." Verse 25, "This is the promise which He Himself made to us, eternal life." He's not writing to make the true Christian doubt, verse 26, "These things I've written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. I just want you to be sure you understand you're His. You're Christians, not antichrists."

Well there's much more to come next time.

As we close tonight, Father, we bring to an end a wonderful day of time in Your Word, time in fellowship, time of testimony, time of praise and worship. We thank You for it. Thank You for again the unfolding of the truth. We're just so rich, we know all these things that others do not know, that the elite and the literate of the world do not know, that the wise philosophers and scribes do not know because You revealed them to us who are babes in Your Word. Beyond that, not only do we know the truth but we...we are in the truth and of the truth because we are in Christ and we thank You that You've not only told us the truth, but You've placed us in the truth and You've placed the truth in us so that we have an anointing from God not needing any human to teach us, because we know what is true because You've given it to us, You've put it in our hearts. Thank You that we are Christians and not antichrists and we pray for any tonight who in looking at their own hearts find themselves in opposition to Christ that they might understand what spirit they possess and what destruction they're a part of for they too are men and women of lawlessness and sons of destruction. We pray that You would rescue them and save them for Jesus' sake, we pray in His name. Amen.

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