

I John 2:18 "That Antichrist"

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Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.

I. The History of Antichrist

- A. John assumed they know THAT vs. many
- B. Part of the apostolic teaching : 2 Thes 2:5
- C. Until he is taken out of the way: 2 Thes 2:7; Daniel 7:8
- D. Rooted in Daniel's prophecy

II. The Character of Antichrist

- A. What does the word mean?
- B. OT
- C. Gospels
- D. Epistles
- E. Revelation

III. The Applying of Antichrist

- A. Who does not fit the description
- B. Westminster Confession 26:5 and RP Testimony
- C. Knowledge of history
- D. Do not be afraid of hard doctrine
- E. Evangelize and love your RC neighbor: Don't assume
- F. Gospel will prevail (Daniel 7:26-27; Rev 20)

As we turn again to the Epistle of First John, you may have noticed there is another one of John's transitions or movements where we go from a very practical section encouraging us against worldliness and now he is transitioning to false teachers and what he calls "the last hour."

What I want to do today is to look at a portion of I John 2:18 in this transition and look at something that John tells his hearers. Let me read that verse one more time: "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come."

What I would like to do today is explore from the Scriptures this idea of antichrist. John mentions it several times and I think that we need to look more in-depth at it at least once and then we can continue in the epistle.

John is quite bold in putting the word antichrist before his hearers—but it really the first time in the whole of the Bible that the word "antichrist" is used. From where's he getting this idea? What's the point of bringing this up? Is this something that John made up or is antichrist found elsewhere in the Scriptures?

Now as we look at this today, I want you to remember that preaching a whole book verse by verse forces the preacher to talk about things that he might not otherwise preach on. And that's good—that gives you the whole counsel of God. And at the same time I would like to issue a little disclaimer: this may be your least favorite sermon ever and it might also be your favorite sermon.

Many people want to hear really practical sermons like we had last week, and that's good—we should have practical sermons that flow from the text of the Bible. And there are others that love the obscure dark corners of the Bible and they may cheer on a sermon about the antichrist and maybe even want a second next week. Either way—whether you are looking forward to hearing this or not looking really looking forward to hearing—I want to remind you that this is the Word of God and the Spirit of God has given us this to help conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Please hear the Word with an ear towards Jesus Christ and being built up in your faith and strengthened in grace.

So let's begin—That Antichrist—I John 2:18.

We are going to begin this morning answering that question “Where does John even get this idea from?” You may not know this but the Apostle John is the only writer in the Bible to even use this word. So is he making this stuff up as he goes along? No—our first heading this morning is “The History of Antichrist.” The history of Antichrist.

Notice the way that John structures the sentence in 2:18. He says “it is the last hour and you have heard *that* antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come.” John is telling his hearers that something that they have already heard—they have already had teaching on this; it’s something that was taught before John taught it to them. And notice that he makes a distinction between *THAT* antichrist and the *many* antichrists.

Sometimes when talking about the doctrine of Antichrist people will just say, “there’s many antichrists” as a way to stop the conversation. Of course there’s many—that’s clearly taught by John—but there is also *that* antichrist that is part of the teaching of the Apostles.

Now I mentioned that John was the first to write the word antichrist down in the Scriptures—and we know that it’s pretty far along in the New Testament—most of the New Testament and almost all of the Bible is written before John’s Epistles; but John says “they have heard this.” It is part of the apostolic teaching.

In 2 Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul also teaches on the doctrine of Antichrist—there Paul uses some words that are different, such as “son of perdition” and “the man of sin” and the “lawless one.” But we can be assured that Paul is teaching the same doctrine that John is teaching and Paul is teaching it much earlier. Most conservative Bible scholars will date 2 Thessalonians around the year 52AD. That’s less than 20 years from the resurrection—very early on. And I want you to notice what Paul writes in 2 Thes. 2:5, “Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”

That’s interesting to me. Here’s a new church just less than 20 years after the resurrection of Christ and the Apostle Paul teaches them this doctrine concerning the antichrist and then later writes about it and calls it to their attention.

I have been pastoring here under a decade, and I think this is the first time I have ever mentioned “antichrist.” But for Paul it is clearly part of the teaching of the church of the New Testament era and it is of great importance to them to understand something about this.

Why? It is because the early church understood the historic nature of prophecy. I will say that again: It is important to the early church because they understood the historic nature of prophecy.

The early church was looking at the Old Testament prophets and they were seeking to find their place in the writing of the OT Scriptures—and it is clear to me that Paul was opening up these prophets so that the church could benefit from them. Look again at 2 Thes. 2, but this time at verse 7: “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only *he who now restrains* will do so *until he is taken out of the way.*”

That’s cryptic. He’s writing in cryptic language; but that language is driving his hearers back to Daniel 7 and Daniel 11.

Daniel 7:8 talks of the “little horn” coming up after the other horns were plucked up—taken out by the root.” This needs to be taken away.

“What are you talking about pastor? Where are we going here?” Well, you see, the prophecy of Daniel and the four beasts is a prophecy that is well known and well understood by all Bible scholars—both Jewish and Christian—almost without controversy—or at least with very little controversy—as unfolding of the empires of this world leading into the time of the New Testament.

There are four beasts—are each called kingdoms and kings and we know who they are; even Daniel tells us who the first three are:

The lion with eagle’s wings: Babylon. The bear with three ribs in his teeth: Medo-Persian Empire. The four headed; four winged leopard: The Greek Empire. The ten headed beast with iron teeth: The Roman Empire.

This is not our text; but you can check this at home—so the fourth beast arises and what we see is that beast produces ten horns and from that horn a little horn comes up. And that little horn, cannot be revealed until the “one that restrains is taken away.” That’s Paul’s language in 2

Thessalonians—he is reminding the church in writing that the Roman Empire; the fourth beast; must collapse or be taken out of the way before the “little horn arises.” That time of apostasy will not come until the empire falls.

The teaching of the antichrist—or the history of antichrist in the Word of God is first extensively taught by Daniel and then the New Testament writers use Daniel’s language and imagery to give a fuller picture of the teaching: Matthew 24; 2 Thessalonians 2; I John 2, 4; Revelation 13; 17; 18; 19; 20 all picking up on Daniel’s language and interpreting the “little horn” and pointing us towards the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That’s heavy stuff. That’s a lot of Bible passages—but I want you to know that this is how the teaching of the Scriptures unfold; this is why we must look at the Word of God systematically and show the connectedness of the Scriptures as we use those more clear passages to shed light on less clear passages. The history of antichrist.

So I’ve shared a bit of the unfolding of this doctrine from Daniel to Revelation and I would encourage you to look at the connections made between these passages, as I cannot take the full time to do all that work, unless you want an excursus sermon series of several months looking into these matters fully. I am sure that’s not the case.

So let’s move on from the history of the antichrist to our second heading, the character of antichrist. The character of antichrist.

This week I went back and forth on how to best handle this text and as you know my style of preaching is more slowly unfolding one text of the Bible rather than the pastors that say, “Now go to this page and then turn here and then flip there.” That level of pulpit gymnastics is draining to me personally—so I won’t make you jump through those hoops either; so I have provided a bulletin insert (THIS IS ATTACHED AT THE END OF THE SERMON MANUSCRIPT) that will reduce the gymnastics and yet hopefully will allow you to go back and fact check me so that you see that this is not fake news.

As we begin I want to define what we are looking for and looking at. The word antichrist, is obviously made up two words; anti and christos. Christ is obvious; but the word “anti” can made two things—it can mean

“against” Christ” or it can mean “in the place of Christ.” That’s John’s word—what else do we have in the Word of God?

The first thing that we can say about the antichrist is that he is the leader of a nation or holds office within a kingdom. We see that in Daniel 7:8 as he is called the little horn. Now the horn in Daniel’s prophecies of the beasts is a king as Daniel interprets the dream himself in that way—but what’s important is that in Daniel’s prophetic statements he describes these as kingdoms as well as kings—so we could say that it is the office of that king representing a kingdom.

We also are able to know that this kingdom from which antichrist will rise is a kingdom that comes out of the Roman Empire. That’s Daniel 7:8 as the little horn comes up from the fourth beast—the fourth beast breaks into 10 horns—or heads in the language of Revelation—and the little horn comes from that. So we know that the antichrist comes from the Roman Empire—not from China, not from the Americas, but from a nation that breaks off from the Roman Empire.

We also learn that this king or this office of a king that comes out of the Roman Empire—he speaks pompous words—or great words. You see that in 7:8. The word means domineering in the Hebrew. He is domineering in his words or speaks big things.

What else do we learn from Daniel? In the same chapter—7:21, 25 and 25 the Word of God teaches us that this antichrist will make war against the church and will change laws and times. He will have some ability to change times and laws—the nations of the world will change under him and laws will change. And the true church will suffer persecution under him—this is said again in Revelation 17.

As we leave the prophecy of Daniel behind we see that the Lord Jesus speaks of the one who is called the “abomination of desolations” standing in the holy place. Paul picks up on that same language in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 where he says that the antichrist would be in the temple of God—this antichrist is someone who claims to be a part of the visible church.

The church is the temple of God—and this antichrist will be among those who count themselves as a part of the church—that temple of God.

So Daniel connected to Matthew connected to 2 Thessalonians.

He's in the church—but there's something more. We see that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 calls him a very specific name: “the son of perdition.” That's a title—Paul is calling our attention to something isn't he? When else has that phrase been used in the Bible? Judas Iscariot is called the Son of Perdition. So not only is that antichrist one who make great and pompous claims—he is one who is in the church—and it looks like he is a deceptive office bearer in the church as well. One who has something of the spirit of Judas Iscariot in him—one ordained; one that the world would look upon and say, “He's close to Jesus.” But in his heart and in reality is a deceptive officer in the church of Christ.

And connected to that deception and that office—Matthew 24:24 and 2 Thes. 2:9 teaches us that this antichrist will deceive with signs and wonders and miracles—the work that he does is connected to signs, wonders and miracles that could even deceive the very elect of God if God would allow it.

2 Thes. 2:3 tells us that he is man. He's personal. So not only is he is a king and an office and leads a nation—we are told that he is a man as well.

This man—this lawless one, this son of perdition exalts himself above the church. That means that he claims a position of authority that over all others in the church. He lifts himself up to that place.

So we see a lot of church related connections with that antichrist—and he is bold in the church. Look at 2 Thes. 2:4. This verse tells us that he shows himself to be God or he sits in the place of God in the church. Does this mean that he personally claims to be God or does it mean that he wants the place of God—the seat that only belongs to God in the church?

Now as we pause to breathe for a minute you might be thinking that it's all so overwhelming and that there's probably more than one antichrist anyway. And that's true—that's what John says—there is the many and there is the one. And then later in the book; chapter 2:22-23 and then in his next epistle as well, we see. That John does tell us that there is one antichrist and there are many antichrists—and that heresies—heresies connected to the Christ, and heresies that can deceive, these are connected to him.

These deceptive heresies that were developing and slowly opening up in the New Testament Church were doing so to bring antichrist on the scene of history—there was already a spirit of antichrist developing in the early church—John tells us that in I John 4:3.

The heresies that we see developing in the early church are setting the stage for him to come: What heresies do we see in the New Testament? Judaizing. Greek philosophy, out of which Gnosticism would come. The elevation of certain teachers and leaders causing true apostles to be cut off. We see all of this—and John calls it the spirit of antichrist.

But that's not where the teaching on antichrist ends in the New Testament: Remember we saw Daniel as the most prominent of the prophets speaking of the antichrist. Then we came to the Lord Jesus in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24 and he too spoke of the antichrist—connecting him back to Daniel. And then we looked at the epistles and we saw that antichrist shows up very early in the apostolic writings—2 Thessalonians and then he also finds about three places in John's epistles.

And I would call you back to our principle of interpretation that says that the Scriptures are to be used to interpret the Scriptures and more clear passages are used to interpret less clear passages.

That brings us to the book of Revelation, which you remember is also written by the Apostle John. And we find familiar language in Revelation 13; 17; 18; 19; and 20.

And it's important to remember that the language of Revelation is drawn from Daniel and that some of the language of Revelation interprets itself—pointing us to the fact that the beast of Revelation and the one who sits upon the whore of Babylon—it is that same man of sin; that same son of perdition; that same lawless one; that same little horn; that same abomination of desolations; that same antichrist that we have seen in so many other places of the Scriptures.

Revelation 13 teaches us something that we have already seen already. This antichrist is going to be connected to both the civil magistrate as well as the church. We see both institutions in that chapter.

And things get really interesting in chapter 17 when the beast and the woman—again persecuting the church—like Daniel 7:21 and 25 told us—that mystery of Babylon is revealed in chapter 17:

17:9 tells us that the antichrist rules from the city which is built on seven hills or seven mountains. Verse 18 teaches us that he reigns over the kings of the earth from this city on seven hills and then in Revelation 18 we are told that the nations of the world live luxuriously with the city over which he reigns, the beast; the antichrist caters to the nations of the world from that city.

The antichrist is adored by the world.

That's a short overview of the antichrist from the Word of God. A slow unfolding but phrases that connect the doctrine from Old Testament prophets to the Lord Jesus Christ to the epistle writers even to the closing of the book of Revelation.

You see this was a teaching that the early church brought to their people because we need to know the enemies of the gospel and those false christs who will be raised up throughout history.

So what do we do with this collection of related texts? Should we all just sit overwhelmed? No, of course not. Our third heading this morning is “The applying of antichrist.” The applying of antichrist.

As we think of application from this little phrase in I John 2:18 as John tells the church of “that” antichrist that is to come... how can we apply it?

Well we first need to think on all the hysteria that sees antichrist around every corner. There are very clear things that we can look for that are drawn from the Word of God, we can be assured that many of the typical contenders are not the antichrist.

The US President—whether he's Republican or Democrat—cannot be the antichrist. He does not meet the criteria of the Scriptures. The US President does not have an office in the church. He does not do signs and wonders. He does not have a kingdom coming out of the Roman Empire.

Nero does not fit the description although some will say Nero. Nero misses

out on the whole host of theological and ecclesiastical requirements for the antichrist—he’s just not it.

Islam is not the antichrist. Islam is not in the church—Islam does not have the ability to deceive people into thinking that it is genuine Christianity. It’s not Islam.

The antichrist is not some European Union leader—he has to have deep ecclesiastical connections. The antichrist is not so much of what people think of because the Word of God sets out so many descriptions and characteristics. And the antichrist must fit all of them.

So who does lead a nation that was once part of the Roman Empire who speaks great words in the church and holds office and exalts himself above all of the church? Who reigns from the city on seven hills and has for centuries made war with true believers, damning to hell those who would believe in justification by faith alone? Who shows himself to sit in the place of God as the vicar—the one in place of? Who else controls a city that is also a nation wherein the world lives luxuriously from her while he deceives the nations with lying signs and wonders and false miracles?

Friends—the Westminster Confession of Faith that the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America subscribes to as our official doctrinal standard says, “There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.”

That’s not just early presbyterians having an axe to grind—it is an exegetically defensible statement based on a clear reading of the Word of God. And to this date there has not been a better or more clearly seen office or person or institution that fits the description of antichrist as the papacy in Rome.

The Testimony of the RPCNA comments on this section which declares the Pope in Rome to be that antichrist—and rightly this clarification is given: “Many antichrists will be present in the world throughout history. Prior to Christ’s coming the final “man of lawlessness” will be revealed. He will be destroyed by Christ.”

And that's what John says right—many will come—but that does not mean that this one—this final man of lawlessness will not be revealed even to the world.

There is no other person or agency or institution when you line up all the possibilities in the world that is able to have every qualification met like the papacy, like the office of pope, the so-called vicar of Christ; the one who claims to stand in the place of our Jesus.

So what can you do? How can you apply this to your life? I am sure and I understand that this is not and ought not to be the priority doctrine of your life; of this church; or of your studies—I want you to remember that this flows out of a context and we must give the weight that it deserves; but not more than the Word of God does. Have a balanced diet of Christian teaching and preaching and reading.

For the second application, I would like to encourage you along the same lines: Do not be afraid of hard doctrines. Not all things are equally clear in Scripture—and if you see something in our Standards that you don't understand—search and find out why we believe certain things. Work hard to know why something is taught and believed; don't just dismiss teaching that you think is hard or radical or strange.

Thirdly, another application flows from the Daniel and 2 Thessalonians connection that the Apostle Paul makes: Daniel taught the church world history. Paul relied on that teaching of world history for his work on antichrist—do not be afraid to study history. The study of history is a handmaid to the church: read it; study it. Work through the four beasts of Daniel and see how the fourth beast breaks into 10 and then the papacy grows out of the one. You will never know the richness of this and many things without studying ancient world history.

A fourth application: do not be afraid to evangelize and love your Roman Catholic neighbors. Modern American Roman Catholicism looks a lot like a high church form of Protestantism; it looks like our Anglican or Lutheran neighbors—but don't assume they know Christ. Don't assume they know the Bible. Love them—point them to Jesus. If the presbyterian understanding of the Pope being antichrist is correct—their leadership seeks to deceive them: love them. Point them to the Christ of the Bible.

And finally, be encouraged—the Word of God teaches us that the word of the mouth of Christ will bring down antichrist—the gospel will prevail. This is not revealed so that we would be fearful and so that we would tremble at the thought of the Pope doing this or that—or so that we would hate the Roman Catholic neighbor... the gospel will prevail—I call on you to cling to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, the one who will conquer antichrist with the words of his mouth and trust in the Jesus revealed in the Bible for only he can forgive sins; only he can save that which was lost. The gospel will prevail.

That Antichrist: the history. The character. The applying. Amen.

Text	Description
Daniel 7:8	Leads a nation; king or series of kings
Daniel 7:8	Kingdom comes out of Roman Empire
Daniel 7:8	Speaks pompous words
Daniel 7:21; 25	Makes war against the church
Daniel 7:25	Changes laws and times
Matt 24:15; 2 Thes 2:4	In the church
John 17:2; 2 Thes 2:3	Deceptive office bearer in the church
Mat 24:24; 2 Thes 2:9	Deceives with signs, wonders, miracles
2 Thes 2:3	He's a man/person
2 Thes 2:4	Exalts himself above the church
2 Thes 2:4; Daniel 11:36	Shows himself to be God or sits in the place of God
I John 2:18	There is one and many
I John 2:22-23; 2 John 7	Deceptive heresies are connected to him
I John 4:3	There's a "spirit of antichrist" that was in the apostolic church
Revelation 13	Connection between civil magistrate and the false church
Revelation 17:9	Rules from "seven mountains"
Revelation 17:18	Rules over a city that reigns over the kings of the earth
Revelation 18:9	The nations live luxuriously with the city over which he reigns

