

1 John 2:18-27 Answers Antichrist

Introduction: Today's passage concerns what many consider to be an end time event: the coming of the Antichrist. Controversy swirls around the identity of this sinister minister of evil. However, we must let the smoke of uncertainty blind us to the clear application this passage of Scripture holds for believers in every generation: deceptive and false teachings about the person and work of Christ.

******What action did John warn the church to take with regard to antichrist (2:18-27)?** In light of the false antichrist teachings, John warned the church to abide in the message they had heard from the beginning (2:24-25).

ESV 1 John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life . . . so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Application: No matter what else you walk away with today, remember this: Stick to the original message the apostles taught. Jesus is the Christ, God the Son, Jehovah in the flesh.

The Last Hour

******According to 2:18, what time was it when John wrote this?** It was the last hour.

Normally, if it was the hour for something to happen, it was meant literally. For example:

ESV Mark 14:41-43a [Jesus speaking] “. . . the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners . . . see, my betrayer is at hand.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came . . .

How is it obvious John did not use the word hour literally (2:18)? John obviously did not use the word hour literally, since it was more than an hour after he wrote until his letter reached his readers. It was days or even weeks later. However, even though John did not use the word hour literally, it seemingly would still indicate something would happen soon, that the time was short. A straight-forward reading of the text leads to the conclusion that John believed he and his readers were on the verge of a crisis. I believe whatever the problem was, it happened back in the first century and was relevant to John and his readers.

John declared it to be the last hour (2:18); the last hour of what? John did was not specific since his readers were evidently already familiar with his subject (for example, “you have heard that antichrist is coming”). Perhaps by last hour John meant the last hour:

1) Of calm before antichrist came (yet he said many antichrists had already come),

- 2) Of the apostolic age, assuming John was the last living apostle (yet the “we” of 1:1ff indicates other apostles were still alive),
- 3) Of the Jewish/Old Covenant era, which would shortly be put to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D.70.
- 4) Of the church age, that last era of redemptive history before the Second Coming (yet it would be strange to use hour even figuratively to refer to a period that has now lasted 2,000 years; that’s a long hour!). They thus see “last hour” as a theological truth rather than a chronological statement (Marshall, p. 148). If this is what John meant, he could have said last days or final one thousand years.

Something Has to Give: People who want to take prophetic descriptions literally have to instead interpret near time statements figuratively. Those who take literally the time statements (near, soon, at hand, shortly) interpret the prophetic descriptions figuratively. (It can be easily demonstrated from already fulfilled Old Testament prophecies that the prophets used hyperbole in their descriptions of future events.)

What fact convinced John that it was the last hour (2:18)? The arrival of many antichrists convinced John it was the last hour. Again, this was something that had already begun when John wrote.

Antichrist(s)

******What paradox about antichrist is found in 2:18?** John predicted antichrist (single) was coming (future) and yet he said many antichrists (plural) had already come (present).

Perspective: Everything the Bible teaches about antichrist is right here in the epistles of John. It is no where else. Revelation never once makes mention of anything called antichrist, nor does any other New Testament author. After today you will be an expert on antichrist.

What does antichrist mean (2:18)? This word is transliterated letter for letter from Greek into English (*antichristos*).

- 1) One possible meaning of *anti* is instead of; if that is what John meant then these antichrists were people claiming to be the true Christ instead of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus warned that false christs would come and deceive many (**Mt 24:24**).
- 2) However, the Greek prefix *anti* more fundamentally means against; to be antichrist is to be against Jesus as the Christ, to be opposed to Christ. Based on John’s description of antichrist teachings, this primary meaning is more in line with what John meant by antichrist. These antichrists were not themselves claiming to Christ, but they were denying that Jesus was the Christ. Just as in history there was first the Protestant Reformation and then the Catholic Counter-reformation, so too there was the true teaching that Jesus is the Christ and then there was the antichrist teaching that Jesus was not the Christ.

— 2:19 —

******According to 2:19, where did these antichrists come from; what was their origin, their source?** They came from within the church! There antichrists were apostate Christians, false teachers who once claimed to believe in Jesus but who had departed from the Faith. Worse yet, they were trying to others with them.

Apostasy: Apostasy is another transliterated Greek word; *apo* means away from; the picture is that of separation. *Stasis* means to stand; thus, to stand away from. Apostasy was big problem in the early church. People defected from the Faith in wholesale fashion when persecution came. For instance, the book of Hebrews was written largely to prevent an entire community of Hebrew believers from defecting.

ESV **Matthew 24:11-12** . . . false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

ESV **Acts 20:29-30** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

ESV **1 Timothy 4:1** . . . the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons . . .

Apostasy Application (2:19): “They are not all of us.” There are today many self-deceived people in churches everywhere, people who think they believe in Jesus but who in reality do not have a saving faith. They are like Judas. Many times such people do eventually leave both the church and the Faith. This is sad and tragic, but it is important to have a mature understanding of the situation so our own faith is not hurt when they depart.

What in 2:19 indicates those who left the church were never true believers in the first place? John clearly stated that they “were not of us” because if they had been of us they would have continued with us. Thus the saying: The Faith that Fizzles before the Finish had a Flaw from the First. They were false professors, not true possessors.

— 2:20-21 —

******What confidence did John have in his readers (2:20-21)?** John was sure they had been anointed by the Holy One and knew and truth. They already knew what they needed to know; there were no new secrets about Jesus.

What does it mean to be anointed by the Holy One (2:20)? See down to 2:26-27. Perhaps this has to do with being divinely protected by God from ultimate failure.

ESV **Ephesians 4:30** . . . do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

— 2:22-23 —

******What can we learn about antichrist teachings from 2:22-23 and 4:2-3?** Antichrist teaching denied that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It also denied that Jesus came in the flesh.

ESV **1 John 4:2-3** By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. **The antichrists denied Jesus is the Christ (2:22-23). Why would they also deny Jesus came in the flesh (4:2-3)?** John did not explain why. Early church heretics claimed that since God is spirit, matter must be evil, so the Christ could not possibly have been a real man.

What in 2:22-23 indicates these antichrists were Jewish apostates rather than Gentile apostates? It was unbelieving Judaism that claimed to worship God the Father apart from Jesus the Son. Pagan Gentiles did not worship God the Father as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures and generally had no interest in who the Jewish Christ would be, since they did not believe in the concept of a Christ anyhow. The crisis John warned about was Jewish Counter-Reformation.

Many sincere people are sincerely and devoutly religious who do not believe in Jesus. What does 2:23 tell us about their relationship to God? Those who deny the Son do not know the Father.

Truth: There is no access to God except through Jesus.

ESV **John 14:6** . . . No one comes to the Father except through me.

Was antichrist a man or a movement, a person or a principle? Some believe antichrist to be an actual person (like the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians or the beast of Revelation); others understand antichrist to be a movement, a set of false teachings and the false teachers who taught it. John wrote of the antichrist much as some might write of apostasy. There is no definite article (“the”) in front of the word antichrist in 2:18. This lack of an article stresses the category or quality (Rienecker, p. 788).

ESV **1 John 4:3** . . . This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Substitute: You have heard that apostate is coming and so now many apostates have come.

What is the significance of the parallel between the liar and the antichrist (2:22)? This suggests anyone who denies Jesus is the Christ is “the” liar and “the antichrist.” Just as no one looks prophetically for an exact identity of “the liar”, so too no one should look for the exact identity “the antichrist”.

ESV **1 John 2:22** . . . This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

Nero the antichrist? Not! If John did intend to convey that one specific person would embodied all antichrist teachings (“the” antichrist), based on 2:19 he would have been an apostate Jewish Christian. This would rule out Nero as antichrist and any of the many unbelieving Jewish zealots who tried to overthrow Roman rule. However, no such supreme church apostate has been found among first century candidates. Some believe that is because this person has not yet come on the world-wide scene. My view is that antichrist was a first century problem, and did not refer to any one first century person, but rather to a set of teachings, a movement, that was promoted by many antichrist teachers who were Jewish apostates from the church.

Application: I believe antichrist was a first century problem and that the last hour has come and gone. That time has run out. John had already taught his readers about antichrist (“you have heard”, 2:18), so he did not elaborate on it in this letter. If it was still a problem for us to be concerned about, God would have seen to it that John was more specific. However, what we can learn from this in general is that there will always be false teachers who deceive others (Benny Hinn, Creflo Dollar, Rob Bell, Joel Osteen):

ESV **1 John 4:1** . . . do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Antidote for Antichrist

******What was John’s antidote for antichrist teachings (2:24-25)?** See 1:1-3. John told them to stick to the original Gospel message they heard from the apostles.

ESV **Galatians 1:8-9** . . . if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed...If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

What promise do we have if we stick to the original apostolic message (2:25)? We are promised eternal life.

ESV **Matthew 24:13** . . . the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Jesus is the Word, both the messenger and the message. Jesus Himself is eternal life.

ESV **1 John 1:2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life . . .

******What confidence did John express in his readers (2:26-27)?** John was confident they had been anointed by the Holy Spirit and thus taught to know truth from a lie.

In what sense did they need no one to teach them (2:27)? If they had no need for any teaching, then why did John essentially teach them via this letter (2:27)? (*Rhetorical*). Those trying to deceive them alleged they needed further teaching about Christ. John was reassuring them they needed no more teaching about the Gospel message.

What command did John give in 2:26-27? They were to abide in Him (the Holy Spirit/Jesus).

So What?

What is the primary application we should take away from 2:18-27? Despite any controversy over antichrist, we are to beware of false teachings about Jesus. In John's day false teachers actively sought to persuade people that Jesus was not the Christ and that he had not come in the flesh.

Today false teachers inside organized churches claim Jesus is not God or was not born of a virgin, or did not die on the cross to pay for sins, or did not rise from the dead, or is not coming back personally. These are theological liberals.

Outside the organized church are others who teach false things about Jesus. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny He is God or that He rose bodily from the dead. The Mormons teach Jesus is only one of many gods (they are polytheists).

What did you learn about antichrist from 2:18-27? Antichrist is found only in John's writings, may be a person but more likely is a teaching, was a first century problem (last hour), was the false doctrine that Jesus was not Christ come in the flesh, was taught by apostate Jewish Christians.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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