

AntiChrist: We've Got It All Wrong!

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Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: 1 John 2:18-23, 26 CSB

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that *Antichrist* is coming, even now many *antichrists* have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. ²¹ I have not written to you because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the *Antichrist*: the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well...I have written these things to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you" (2:18-23, 26)

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the *Antichrist*, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world... This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deception." (1 Jn. 4:1-3, 6)

SUMMARY:

The Antichrist is often depicted as the ultimate evil figure in end-times narratives: a dictator who amasses power through deceit and miracles, demanding global worship in opposition to God. Many Christian books and movies blend various NT figures, such as false Christs, false prophets, Paul's 'man of lawlessness,' and the Beast from Revelation, labeling them all as 'the Antichrist.' This

approach is flawed; Scripture does not designate any of these figures as the Antichrist. Critics call this amalgam an "Antichrist stew."

Only John's letters use the term 'antichrist,' and they define it very differently. In 1 and 2 John, the Antichrist is a spirit working through John's adversaries, denying Christ's incarnation. There isn't one future Antichrist but many antichrists, already active within the church, not outside in the world. John's vision calls for a shift in focus: Christians need vigilance now to discern the Spirit of truth from the spirit of error within Christianity & their own churches, rather than scanning the horizon of world events for an emerging autocratic Antichrist.

1. The Precipitating Event — Rupture in John's Church (1 Jn. 2:19)

- "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. However, they went out so that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us." (1 Jn. 2:19)

a. Departure of a Sizeable Group – "They went out from us..." (2:19)

- "We...infer from 1 Jn. 2:19 that there has recently been a serious rift [split] within the community which resulted in the exodus [departure] of what was probably a sizeable proportion of its membership... It was this defection which has prompted the author to declare...that Antichrist is abroad [around] & the final evil is upon them." [Wendy S. North, *Lazarus Story Within the Johannine Tradition*, p. 63]
- "In... 1 John a crisis with the schismatics [opponents] prompted a view that 'the last hour' is now and the antichrists are here... drawing on end-time... ideas to interpret their situation. *The author ...finds solace... What happened was expected* – at least according to the [Johannine] tradition." [Jan G. van der Watt, *Grammar of the Ethics of John*, 2, p. 250]
- "*The function of the [Antichrist] tradition in 1-2 John is a pastoral one: ...the author is able to point out that the schism [split] that has taken place was meant to take place.* This emerges the clearest in 1 Jn. 2:18... It is remarkable... that the author of 1 John uses the tradition of the Antichrist as an [End-time] foundation for his exhortations in 2:18." [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *Antecedents of Antichrist*, p. 111]

b. Voluntary Departure; Not Excommunication

- "They left. 'They went out from us.' *Most likely this was a voluntary departure not an excommunication...*" [Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, 3 John*, p. 51]
- "These 'antichrists' once were members of this community but 'went out from us.' *This does not suggest their expulsion or excommunication, but simply that they left.* The author says that 'they were not of us,' and the clearest proof of this seems to be that they were schismatic [divisive], thus violating the love ethic, which is paramount in the Johannine community... It appears that the church is viewed as a *corpus mixtum* [Latin: 'mixed body,' composed of], both '*wheat & tares*' ['weeds' 13:24-43] at the same time. This also suggests that the evidence of the antichrists' true spiritual character was not clear until they left, or at least until they denied that Jesus is the Christ & then split off." [Ben Witherington, *Letters & Homilies...*, Vol. 1, p. 486]
- In 1 John there's *no "indication of excommunication by leaders of the community.... The decision to leave is deliberate, calculated, & voluntary... 'They did it of their own free will; there's no sign that the community took the initiative in expelling them' (Schnackenburg).*" [C. Adrian Thomas, *Case for Mixed-audience... [in] Warning Passages*, 169 #293]

c. Not over non-essential Matters (e.g. Paul & Barnabas Acts 15:36-40)

- "Paul told Barnabas, "Let's go back & visit the brothers & sisters in every town where we have preached ...& see how they're doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take along John...Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take along this man who had deserted them... ³⁹ They had such a *sharp disagreement that they parted company*, & Barnabas took Mark with him & sailed off to Cyprus. ⁴⁰ But Paul chose Silas & departed..." (Acts 15:36-40)

d. Dispute over an Essential Doctrine – Person of Christ (1 Jn. 2:22; 4:2-3)

- A group of "opponents have withdrawn from the community in a dispute over Christological doctrine... which [was] a bitter split... *This division appears to be a new development within the NT ...*There are plenty of examples of doctrinal disagreements within Paul's congregations ...but not... of *complete separation from fellowship... [by] a group.*" [W. Hall Harris, *1, 2, 3 John*, pp. 107-8]

e. 'Secessionists' never were genuine Christ-believers (2:19)

- "Perhaps [previously]... the secessionists considered themselves members of the Christian community... These people, however, have withdrawn from the community in a dispute over Christological doctrine... that has every indication of being a bitter 'split.' ...The phrase '*they were not of us*' (2:19) identifies [their] spiritual relationship & condition... prior to their withdrawal. Although previously associated with the Christian community... they *never truly belonged to it*. They professed to be genuine believers & members of the community, but really they were not, & their...secession demonstrated this conclusively." [Herbert W Bateman, *Workbook... on 1-3 John*, p. 133]
- Like Judas: "In what's probably more than coincidence, the same verb used to describe the departure of the opponents here ([Gk.] *exelthan*) was used [Jn. 13:30] ... of the departure of Judas from the upper room... Just as Judas betrayed Jesus, so the secessionists... betrayed their fellow members of the community & have 'gone out into the darkness' (as Judas went into the night)." [W. Hall Harris, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 108]
- "This does not imply that if someone leaves a *particular local church* at any time he is not regenerate. It does imply, however, that attachment to an orthodox assembly is an expected result of regeneration." [Ken Casillas, *Beyond Chapter & Verse*, p. 270]

f. Harsh Denunciation – "*Liars, Deniers, Deceivers, Antichrists, false prophets*" (2:22-3, 26; 4:1)

- "Who is the *liar*, if not the one who *denies* that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the *Antichrist*: the one who *denies* the Father & the Son. ²³ No one who *denies* the Son has the Father..." (1 Jn. 2:22-23)
- "I have written these things to you concerning those who are *trying to deceive* (1 Jn. 2:26)
- "Many *deceivers* have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. *This is the deceiver & the Antichrist.*" (2 Jn. 7)
- "...Many *false prophets* have gone out into the world... every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the *Antichrist*, which you have heard is coming; even now it is already in the world... This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the *spirit of deception.*" (1 Jn. 4:1-3, 6)
- "*The tone* of the [author] toward those ['secessionists'] who left the community *is so harsh* that he deems them to be 'antichrists' (1 Jn. 2:18; 2 Jn. 7-8) who were never a true part of the community as evidenced by their willingness to leave (2:19) & by their ultimate denial that 'Jesus is the Christ' (2:22-23). The problem facing John is that *these opponents are now trying to proselytize the Johannine churches* (2:26) ...When John speaks about the opponents who went out... *he writes in a harsh & polemic tone*. He has no patience with their positions & argues that they are 'children of the devil' (3:8) ...The purpose of the letter... is to urge the continued faithfulness of the Johannine community by *dealing harshly with the opponents who left* the community." [Edward Watson, "*Litmus Test of God's Children*," *Pax Pneuma*, Vol. 6, #1 (2012) p. 33]
- "Some of the most provocative... comments ...in 1 & 2 John have to do with... 'antichrist.' These texts contain the earliest known occurrences of the term 'antichrist'... & they bequeathed it to the generations that followed." [Craig R. Koester, "*Antichrist Theme...*," in RA Culpepper (ed.) *Communities in Dispute*, p. 187]

g. Church Rupture: Spiritual Forces behind Human Agents (1 Jn. 4:1-6)

- The "spiritual battle between good & evil unfolds in this material world... The spirits of error work in false prophets as the Spirit of truth works in the believers, impacting their lives & actions... *The Johannine group concretely experienced the destructive presence of the antichrists... & the deception of the false prophets* who act under the influence of the spirits of error." [Jan G. van der Watt, *cit.*, p. 248]

h. 'Antichrist' – a Power, a Person, or a Spirit?

- Concerning "the Antichrist [there] are 2 main lines of thought...: (1) that the antichrist is a *power or movement* [AI, Wealth, Money, World Bank, UN; Ideology, (e.g. Marxism, imperialism, nationalism, tribalism)]; (2) that the antichrist is a *human person at the end of history* [a dictator, autocrat, Pope, etc.] ... There's also a 3rd dimension (3) a...[Spirit/] spiritual dimension, without individual, institutional, political, or military associations. *That theological or spiritual aspect of the Antichrist is the thrust of 1 and 2 John*... Many people are so interested in... the future, externally, that they don't realize that antichrist in this 3rd...sense *already is present among & even in us* (1 Jn. 2:18) & *has been present since John wrote.*" [Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, p.]
- "One...question...[about] the antichrists is whether [they] are... a *purely human phenomenon*, or whether we are to see *behind them some spiritual force*...While the *antichrists are experienced...as*

human entities, behind them is another force making war against God and his people... '1 John has begun a chain of identifications of the Antichrist...[with] enormous repercussions in Christian history' (Brown)... There are times when erroneous

- teaching...has to be named and *its origins exposed.*" [Colin G. Kruse, *Letters of John*, p.]

2. Antichrist: Christians have it all Wrong!

- "John never speaks of 'the Antichrist' as an evil end-time [human] individual at all." — Jonathan Menn
- In John's "Epistles the antichrist is *not known through signs & wonders or...persecution... but by words* that negate ...Jesus' humanity." —Craig Koester
- "The Antichrist envisioned by...1 John must have been conceived of as a supernatural figure." — Bert Liettaert Peerbolte
- The "many antichrists...are not supernatural, apocalyptic figures, but...John's opponents, schismatic Christians." —D. Moody Smith
- John "regards the prediction of the coming of the Antichrist as fulfilled. There's no need to speculate further..." — Bert Liettaert Peerbolte

a. Popular Contemporary Concepts of Antichrist

- "Writers from antiquity onward... envisioned...the antichrist as...the consummate evil human being... the agent of Satan on earth." — Craig Koester
- "Antichrist: Popularly portrayed as the son of a human mother & satanic father. Antichrist is the evil counterpart to Jesus Christ... The human Jesus is total goodness. Antichrist is wholly evil." [Paula Clifford, *Brief History of End Time*, p. 111]
- "Revelation presents [Caesar] Nero as a 'beast' (Rev. 13; 17) ... [But,] contrary to...popular notions, Nero is not described as 'the Antichrist' in Revelation...there's no single Antichrist figure in Revelation or anywhere else in the NT... In [John's] epistles, [an] antichrist is a type of person – anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ (2:22 [etc.]). Indeed, [John] makes it clear there are many antichrists (2:18). Some conflate this antichrist type with the 'man of lawlessness' in 2 Thess. 2:3 & the 'beast' in Revelation, but this reflects later theological speculation, not the content of the [biblical] texts themselves." [David L. Eastman, *Many Deaths of Peter & Paul*, p. 175]
- "Writers from antiquity onward... envisioned...the antichrist as...the consummate evil human being... the agent of Satan on earth. He's often pictured as a political ruler who'll reign during the final years of this present age & persecute those who refuse to worship him. But in the End, there will be a cosmic battle in which the returning Christ will destroy the antichrist & bring him to a fiery end. *What's so striking is how little of [this] scenario has to do with 1 & 2 John.*" [Craig R. Koester, "Antichrist..." in RA Culpepper (ed.) *Communities in Dispute*, p. 187]

b. "The term antichristos ['Antichrist'] ...is solely found in the Johannine epistles" —Paul Anderson

- "The term [Gk.] antichristos ['Antichrist'] never occurs in Revelation but is solely found in the Johannine epistles, so their backdrop should be the primary [interpretive] consideration. While the [Antichrist] threat has been predicted long ago [2:19a], it is not used in futuristic ways, but in actualized ones — literally ['now' 2:19b]. While 'the spirit of the Antichrist' [4:3] is used in the singular, nearly all references to that threat are plural:'Antichrists'." [Paul N. Anderson, "Antichristic Errors," in JH. Ellens (ed.) *Text & Community*, Vol. 1, p. 216]
- John's "Letters are the only biblical documents in which the term 'antichrist' appears. In... these letters... [it] needs to be noted that it ['antichrist'] ... isn't referring to an evil counter-Christ who is out to take over the world. For one thing, the term is plural – 'they're all over the place, antichrists everywhere...' (1 Jn. 2:18 Message)." [Eugene Peterson, *Message Devotional Bible, Featuring notes...*, p.]
- "John is the only biblical writer to actually use the term 'antichrist,' & his descriptions of antichrist in 1-2 John are considerably different from most popular contemporary conceptions of antichrist. John never speaks of 'the Antichrist' as an evil end-time individual at all." [Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, p.]

c. The Church Fathers' 'Antichrist' —beginnings of "Antichrist Stew"

- "Irenaeus [~130 AD] ... [tried] to discern coherence between a number of early Christian writings, which spoke of Christ's great opponent in individual terms. He identified the 'beast from the sea' in Rev 13:1-

10 with the 'man of lawlessness' in 2 Thess 2:1-12 and the 'antichrist'...in the Johannine Epistles. The resulting figure was known as Antichrist." [Craig R. Koester, "...*Beast from the Land (Rev 13:11-18)*," in AY. Collins (ed.) *New Perspectives on...Revelation*,]

- "Irenaeus & Hippolytus, who wrote in the late 2nd & early 3rd century CE...created a unified portrait of the antichrist by synthesizing elements from various biblical passages. The term "antichrist" was taken from the Johannine Epistles, &... combined with Revelation's description of the tyrannical ruler...[in] Rev. 13 this *beast ...has the number 666*. This vision from Revelation was fused with 2 Thess. 2, which warns about the 'man of lawlessness'..." [Craig R. Koester, *cit.*, p. 189]

d. Contemporary Christians' Composite — an "Antichrist Stew"

- "The singular ['Antichrist'] refers to *one personal embodiment of evil* to be manifested at the end of the age." [HF. Paschall, HH. Hobbs (eds.) *Teacher's Bible Commentary* (1972) p.] **Wrong!**
- "One of the clearest abuses of a conservative, exegetical approach to the literal meaning of Scripture is... a process... [of] selecting of negative biblical references—not all of them by any means, but a smattering of several—& mixing them up in a '*villainous stew*' of biblical adversaries. Pejorative references are especially lifted from Daniel, Ezekiel, the Synoptics, 2 Thess., the Johannine Epistles, & Revelation, whether or not there was any historical or literary connection between these biblical writings. Then, meanings are forged into a unified amalgam which targets a contemporary threat ... Nowhere is this tendency as corrupt & extensive as the clustering of pejorative terms around the biblical 'Antichrist' figure... the generalized stirring of these images into an '*antichristic stew*', allowing the interpreter to dip into it & pick out the pieces that relate to contemporary details in a seeming confirmation of conspiratorial speculation, distorts the biblical picture of these figures rather than clarifying it." [Paul N. Anderson, *Op. cit.*, p. 200]

e. Conflating End-time Figures with John's 'Antichrist'

- "The antichrist in popular religious culture has strong connections with... Revelation, based on *identifying* [equating] *the apocalyptic image of the beast with the antichrist*, who is often portrayed ... as a future world ruler who will set himself against Christ & his people in hostile & violent acts & is associated with the number 666. *But John*, the only biblical writer to use the term, *defines it quite differently*. [1.] First, there are 'many' antichrists. [2.] Second, they are not in the future but ['now'] have been among, & [3.] may have emerged out of, the very [church] community (-ties) to whom John writes..." [Karen H. Jobes, 1, 2, 3 *John*, 123]
- "'The abomination which causes desolation' (Mk 13:14), ...'the man of lawlessness' (2 Thess. 2:3-12) ... the 2nd beast and 666 (Rev. 13:11-18) ... None of these are implied directly or otherwise by the Johannine Antichrist passages. They refer to completely different threats — literally & historically. The Johannine Antichrists were neither Romans nor Syrians; *they were Johannine 'Christians'* who had either left the community as *deserters* [secessionists] (1 Jn 2:18-25) or were coming to the community as *false teachers* [false prophets] (1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn 7)." [Paul N. Anderson, *cit.*, p. 200]
- "'The antichrist' was *not initially some supernatural apocalyptic figure in the Bible*; such figures are given *different names & are described differently* in Scripture. [The 'many antichrists'] in the Bible are simply those who deny Jesus was the Christ, & that he came 'in the flesh.' Everything else is a *much-later conflation* of other words & verses into the concept of 'antichrist' that was originally limited to the author of 1 & 2 John." [Jordan Smith, "*What is the Antichrist & is it in the Bible?*" Bible & Archaeology (University of Iowa) April 17, 2023]

f. John's Antichrist conflated with Paul's 'Man of Lawlessness (Sin)' (2 Thess. 2:3-4)

- ? The "day [of the Lord] will not come unless... *the man of lawlessness* is revealed...[who] exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship... *he sits in God's temple, proclaiming that he himself is God*...The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, *with every kind of miracle, both signs & wonders* serving the lie, & with every wicked deception among those who are perishing." (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 9-10)
- "*The man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2:1–12 is the Antichrist* who will come on the world scene at the beginning of the 'Day of the Lord'...sometimes called the 'end times'..." —John N. Darby
- ? **Dispensational Pre-tribulation Rapture theory (e.g. the Left Behind series)**
- According to Dispensationalists' Pre-tribulation Rapture theory, "A world leader known as the Antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18), the 'man of lawlessness' (2 Thess. 2:3-4), & the Beast (Rev. 13:1-8) is expected to form a single world government during the tribulation [period]." [Craig R. Koester, *Revelation & the End of All Things*, p.]

- “Since Christians will be raptured before the beginning of the tribulation, we [Christians] who are alive during the church age *will not see the Antichrist’s rise to power.*” [*Will Christians see the Antichrist?*org]
- **Note:** In the Pre-tribulation Rapture view, ‘the Antichrist’ “appears as a cunning politician only *after we are gone* [i.e., after Christians are raptured. Yet,] the Bible’s literal ‘antichrist’ passages [1 Jn.] clearly point to things that are here & now & which true Christians must face & overcome.” [Steve Wohlberg, *End Time Delusions*, p. 57]
- Humanity “will move into all-out rebellion against God when the *Antichrist appears* (2 Thess. 2:4) *‘the man of lawlessness is revealed’ ... elsewhere called the ‘antichrist’* (1 Jn. 2:18, [etc.]) will personify hostility to God & his revelation...” [Colin Nicholl, *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2317, #2:3]
- “This looks very convincing— until you realise that the coherence of this scheme belongs entirely to the writer, & bears little or no relation to what the Bible actually says! *The NT nowhere identifies the ‘man of lawlessness’ with the ‘antichrist.’*” –Ian Paul, “*Antichrist, man of lawlessness, & the Beast,*” Psephizo.com, July 31, 2020] ? **A Misdirected Quest – Who is the Antichrist?**
- “The whole task of *identifying the Antichrist... is a misdirected quest.* The [biblical] text never calls upon us to identify the antichrist.” [Stephen J. Nicols, “*Prophecy makes Strange Bedfellows,*” JETS, 44/1 (2001) p. 75]

g. John’s Antichrist: Christ’s Opponent vs Paul’s ‘Man of lawlessness (sin)’ –false Christ (2 Thess. 2)

- “The ‘man of lawlessness will lead the world into rebellion against God, perform wonders though Satan’s power, & finally will *present himself as a god to be worshiped.*” [Zondervan, *NIV Foundation Study Bible*, p. 1290]
- John’s “*antichrist ... doesn’t make himself an object of worship... John’s “Epistles do not depict an antichrist who says, ‘Believe that I’m the Christ & that Jesus is not.’”* — Craig Koester
- “*In the Johannine Epistles... There are no signs & wonders.* There’s *no violent persecution* of the saints & most significantly, *Antichrist is not a figure who makes himself an object of worship.* Instead, the Antichrist works by... negation... The essence of the *Antichrist’s work... is to sever the connection between the title ‘Christ’ & the human being named Jesus... denying that Jesus’ humanity had any salvific significance.*” [Koester, pp. 189-91]
- “2 Thess. 2:3-15 has loomed large in the history of the Antichrist legend, although *the term never appears in the letter* [2 Thess.]. In fact, the term ‘antichrist’ is found only in the Johannine letters with reference to anyone who denies ‘that Jesus is the Christ’ (1 Jn. 2:22). Although the term is associated with the end times, [in 1 Jn.] *it refers not to a single figure but to a spirit of opposition to Christ expressed by many [antichrists:] ‘even now many antichrists have come...’* (1 Jn. 2:18). In subsequent centuries *‘antichrist’ was conflated with various figures embodying evil in biblical apocalyptic literature – the ‘little horn’ in Dan. 7:8, 11; the ‘beast’ in Rev. 13:3-4 [etc.], the ‘false Christs’ in Mk. 13:22 &, notably... the ‘man of lawlessness’ & the ‘son of destruction’ in 2 Thess. 2:3, 8.*” [Florence M. Gillman, *1 Thessalonians*, p. 159]
- A marked “*difference from the other NT examples of the anti-[Christ] tradition* is the nature of the opposition espoused in 1-2 John. The *Antichrist is marked out by his rejection of some key Christological tenets of the Johannine community & thus constitutes a religious rather than political opponent.* This characteristic stands *in contrast with other Antichrist... depictions elsewhere in the NT which never espouse a doctrinal debate to be at the centre of the conflict.* In Jesus’ eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels the false messiahs do not deny the tenets of messianic identity, but rather claim them for themselves.” [Mateusz K. Kusio, *Antichrist Tradition in 2nd Temple Judaism & Early Christianity*, 176]
- “The antichrist of the Johannine Epistles *is not to be identified* with any of the various apocalyptic false prophets of ancient Jewish & Christian eschatology. The false prophets of Mark’s apocalypse (Mark 13:6, 22 [etc.]), the ‘lawless one’ (2 Thess. 2:3-12), the second Beast of the Apocalypse (Rev. 12; 13) ... all perform signs & are attended by supernal portents. *None of these are referred to as ‘antichrist’ in Israelite literature.*” [Allen D. Callahan, *Love Supreme: A History of Johannine Tradition*, pp. 27-28]

h. 1 John addresses ‘Antichrist(s),’ not ‘false-Christ(s)’ (pseudo-Christ(s))

- ? “There’s *no evidence that the antichrist* was thought of as one who *tries to usurp Christ’s place* [i.e., not a falseChrist seeking worship.]” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, Op. cit., p. 110]
- “The term ‘false Christs’ [Gk. *pseudo-Christo*] is used only twice (Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22) ... The Gospel passages do not refer to ‘a deceiver’ or ‘false Christ’ in the singular as do John’s & Paul’s writings” [Tyndale Bible Dict. p]

- “Unlike the figures in Mark 13:5-6, 21-22, we are not dealing with pseudo-messianic figures (false Christs). Rather, here the ‘anti’ signals opposition to the identification of Jesus as the Christ, involving the denial (in truth) that... Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22-23).” [John Painter, 1, 2, & 3 John, p.]
- “The role of ‘*the Antichrist*’ of 1-2 John is totally different from that of the [‘false-prophets’] of Mark 13 & Matt. The most important difference... is the fact that ‘*the Antichrist*’ is... a metaphysical being, whereas the [‘false-prophets’] are human beings.” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, Op. cit., p. 110]

i. Ongoing Impact of ‘Antichrist Stew’

- “The later [interpretive] *tradition has shaped many readers* of [John’s] Epistles & it continues to influence the interpretation of these passages, sometimes in subtle ways.” [Craig R. Koester, Op. cit., 188]

3. Antichrist: John’s Unique Portrait

a. Antichrist & the ‘last hour’ (2:18)

- “Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour.” (2:18)

a. The ‘last hour’ – not chronological time, but [‘End-time’] time’ (like the ‘Doomsday Clock’)

- “Obviously the author is referring to [End-time] *teaching well known to the readers*, so...the appearance of ‘antichrists’...is a definite sign that the ‘last hour’ has come... Here, however, the thought is *modified through* the typical *Johannine ‘realized’ eschatology...* [End-time] events had already occurred... ‘Antichrist’ is found only in [1-2 John] in the NT...They *associate it with false Christology, but that is plainly [John’s] innovation.*” [David Rensberger, 1-3 John, p. 77]

b. John’s ‘realized eschatology’ – ‘the Future is now’

- “The language of [End times] is [applied] to the contemporary world: ‘Children, it is the last hour. And as you’ve heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come...They went out from us...that it might be made clear that none of them belongs to us’ (2:18-20). *The present is permeated with a crucial*” [Chris. Rowland, “*Joachim of Fiore & theology of NT*,” JE. Wannemacher (ed.) *Joachim... & ...Inspiration*, p.]
- “The elder, [John]...does not ask, ‘*Who is the antichrist?*’ but asks, ‘*What does it mean that destructive false teaching about...the Christ event is being promulgated in the churches?*’ His answer: *this is the antichrist*, a sign of the end...The elder identified the expected antichrist with the false teachers he saw corrupting the church of his own time. In the apocalyptic drama, they... appear just before the end. [But, he] *saw them as already [here]* ... The... crisis signalled by the appearance of ‘many antichrists’ was proof... it was already ‘the last hour’ [&] he lived in renewed hope of the Parousia (1 Jn. 2:28-3:3).” [M. Eugene Boring, *Hearing John’s Voice*,]

b. What John’s Community knows about the Antichrist

a. John’s community heard about a singular Antichrist

- 1-2 John demonstrate there “was indeed a *tradition of the Antichrist...known to the readers...*The [readers] ... understood that Antichrist to be the final, [End-time] opponent of Jesus Christ. He was expected to act shortly before the end...” [Bert Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, p. 109]
- “*The expectation of the antichrist is [something]... the community already knows about...* The expectation relates to...*a singular figure*, which the author then applies to specific opponents... implying... *teaching about the end-time was practiced* in the Johannine community... *Without the Christ there cannot be an ‘anti-Christ’ ... [So,] the term’s origin needs to sought in the Christian ...Johannine tradition.*” [J. Leonhardt-Balzer, “*Ruler of the world, Antichrists ...*” in CH. Williams (ed.) *John’s Gospel & Intimations of Apocalyptic*, p. 193]
- “The tradition of *the Antichrist must be...of a supernatural opponent of Jesus Christ... The Antichrist envisioned by... 1 John must be... a supernatural being... not a personification.*” [Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, pp. 101-2]

b. The Community’s prior Knowledge – “You’ve heard that Antichrist is coming...” (2:18)

- “A tradition on the Antichrist is apparently being cited & applied to the opponents of the author of 1 John... The author refers to *a tradition of the Antichrist known to his audience...* [So,] he considers it superfluous to give any detailed information on it... A number of aspects [are implied by] 2:18:
 - a. The Antichrist was expected to come immediately before the *Parousia* of Christ...Antichrist is the final [End-time] opponent of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Omitting any further description... of the Antichrist reveals [there] was a *tradition of the Antichrist*; the word [‘Antichrist’] is not an *ad hoc*
 - c. The word [Gk.] *antichristos* may indicate the function... ‘*anti*’ can mean ‘*against*’ or ‘*instead of*’
 - d. The identification of the ‘heretics’ [secessionists] as antichrists & the conclusion... — the end is near – imply that *the author identified the appearance of the ‘heretics’ [opponents] as the appearance of the Antichrist himself...* [This] means... the author

regards *the prediction of the coming of the Antichrist as fulfilled*. There's no need to speculate further [about] the coming of the Antichrist... [It also] means that the tradition of the Antichrist must be... of a supernatural opponent of Jesus Christ... *The Antichrist envisioned by... 1 John must be... a supernatural being... not a personification.* [Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, pp. 101-2]

c. John: 'The Antichrist' & 'many antichrists'

- ? "What's striking here is that the Antichrist... has already come, & there are many antichrists." – Eugene Boring
- "The most important way, in which 1-2 John depart from the earlier anti-[Christ] traditions, is that they *overtly posit a plurality of the Antichrists, but speak about a singular Antichrist, too.*" — Mateusz Kusio
- "The Johannine Epistles use the term 'antichrist' in the singular for *one who denies Christ & for the source of the spirits that lead people into false belief* (1 Jn. 2:22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7). But the term can also be used for multiple figures, known as 'antichrists' (1 Jn. 2:18)." [Craig R. Koester, "...Beast from the Land (Rev 13: 11-18), p. #31]

a. John's 'Antichrist' – a supernatural figure — expected;

- "*The Antichrist envisioned by...1 John must have been conceived of as a supernatural figure.*" –Lietaert Peerbolte
- "*Antichrist is no remote supernatural figure, but stalks the earth in the opponents of... John, [bringing] ... apocalyptic danger.*" – Christopher Rowland
- **Not:** "Writers from antiquity... envisioned...the *antichrist as...the consummate evil human being*" –Craig Koester

b. John's 'many antichrists' – John's human opponents — unexpected

- "The coming Antichrist [is] expected...*What's unexpected is that...many antichrists have arrived.*"—Moody Smith
- John's readers "have heard of the coming Antichrist...[as] some expected apocalyptic figure...*What's unexpected is... that... many antichrists have arrived. They [many antichrists] are not supernatural, apocalyptic figures, but apparently John's opponents, schismatic Christians who have left the fellowship of the community (2:19) ... Perhaps...we too easily pose the [either/or] alternative of either apocalyptic figures or opponents...John conceives of [human opposition with] supernatural overtones.*" [D. Moody Smith, *1-3 John*, p. 72]
- "The shocking announcement [is] that while John's original readers (& many readers today) may have been expecting a larger-than-life evil person to arise, the kind of heretical teaching going around was actually an evil of similar proportion that could also effectively destroy the church." [Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, 3 John*, p. 123]
- ? The "many antichrists...*are not supernatural, apocalyptic figures, but...John's opponents, schismatic Christians.*"—D. Moody Smith
- "In [John's] epistles, [an] antichrist is a type of person – anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22[etc.]). Indeed, the author makes it clear there are many antichrists (1 Jn. 2:18)." [David L. Eastman, *Many Deaths of Peter & Paul*, p. 175]
- In John's "Epistles, the *antichrist is not an individual, but the secessionists in the churches* sharing the spirit of antichrist. They are false prophets not confessing...Christ...came in the flesh." [DF. Watson, *Letters of John*, 77]

d. The one Antichrist inspires the many antichrists

- ? John's "*antichrist has no flesh of his own... Instead, he takes up residence in the people who give voice to the beliefs he promotes.*" — Craig Koester
- "In [1 Jn.] 2:18-27 the *one Antichrist* who is heralded by tradition *is recognized in the many antichrists* that have come. Nothing is said of any further activity of the Antichrist himself. In [1 Jn.] 4:1-6 *the Antichrist is presented as the one who inspires those who oppose the true Christian confession*, & this activity shows that the *Antichrist has already come...* The opposition [opponents] in 1 Jn. 4 is portrayed as... the activity of the principal opponent [of Christ], *the Antichrist.*" [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, pp. 105-6]
- "As the Spirit of God inspires those who confess Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh, [so,] *the spirit of the Antichrist inspires the deniers* [4:2-3]... He inspires them, and *is present in their denial of Christ*. In this way [John] can say that the Antichrist is in the world already (2:18; 4:3). But he is more than the sum of the deniers. The *Antichrist is... a superhuman being who inspires [End-time] opposition against Christ.*" [Bert Lietaert Peerbolte, *Op. cit.*, p. 110]

e. Antichrists emerge from the Church –John's Christian community (1 Jn. 2:19)

- "1 John appears...distinctive [in that] the *antichrist arises from the believing community*" –Daniel Streett

- “In the Johannine epistles... the *antichrist is plural*, representing all those who hold erroneous views of the person of Christ and were *already manifest in the church* at the time of [John’s] writing.” [Duane F. Watson, “Antichrist,” in Ralph P. Martin (ed.) *Dictionary of the Later NT*, p.]
- “In 1 Jn. 2:18 there are false teachers, little antichrists, *from within the [Christian] community*, who have departed, but still threaten to deceive Christians...” [GK. Beale, “Eschatology,” in RP Martin (ed.) *cit.*, p.]
- ? “In [John’s] Epistles *the one antichrist is transformed into many, the future becomes present, and the enemy... can operate within the believing community itself.*” –Craig Koester

f. John’s conclusion based on the Church Split

- ? John “test[s] the spirits... [&] knows the Spirit of truth [from] the spirit of deception.” (1 Jn. 4:1, 6)
- “The arrival of antichrists/false prophets who are ‘in/from the world’ (4:1-6) signals an indeterminate ‘last hour’(2:18).” [David Nienhuis, Robert W. Wall, *Reading the Epistles of...John as Scripture*, p.]
- “In... 1 John a *crisis with the schismatics prompted a view that ‘the last hour’ is now & the antichrists are here...* drawing on end-time... ideas to interpret their situation. The author [John]...finds solace... What happened was expected – at least according to the tradition.” [Jan G. van der Watt, *cit.*, p. 250]
- ? “*There comes a time when leadership must sacrifice unity for the sake of the truth.* Sometimes right belief is more important than cohesion and oneness. *Unity is not the ultimate virtue in the Christian faith.* John here is a ‘co-conspirator’ in the splitting of his church because he stood firm in the truth. Certainly, he mourned for these people, but he did not regret his decision (2:18-19).” [Gary Burge, *1-3 John*, p. 141]

g. What do John’s Antichrists do?

- ? “The essence of the antichrist’s work...is to sever the connection between the title ‘Christ’ & the human being named Jesus...” –Craig Koester
- John’s “*Antichrist is not a figure who makes himself an object of worship.* Instead, the Antichrist works by... negation... The established confession is that Jesus is the Christ who came in the flesh. *The work of the Antichrist is to negate this.* [So,] 1 John... ask[s]: ‘Who is the liar, if not the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father & the Son.’ (1 Jn. 2:22). And 2 Jn. will insist: ‘the deceiver & the antichrist’ is the one who does ‘not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh’ (2 Jn. 7) ...Antichrist drains this confession of certain content ...Antichrist... offer[s] a substitute form of belief by denying certain claims about Jesus... The essence of the Antichrist’s work... is to sever the connection between the title ‘Christ’ & the human being named Jesus... denying that Jesus’ humanity had any salvific significance.” [Craig Koester, *Op. cit.*, pp. 189-91]
- “1 Jn. 4:3 ... speaks of ‘*the spirit of the antichrist.*’ ...2:22 ...makes plain what the spirit of antichrist is all about: they are liars who deny ‘that Jesus is the Messiah.’ And their strategy is deceptive & seductive... They redefine Him. They reimagine Him ...The spirit of antichrist always diminishes the person & work of Christ... The antichrist spirit thinks & then teaches incorrectly about who Jesus Christ is & what Jesus Christ has done ...it will attempt to lead you down the road of spiritual error that’s a theological dead end.” [D Akin, *Op. cit.*, pp 48-9]

h. The Antichrist is a Spirit, working via false prophets/teachers as a collective force for Evil

- “This is how you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that *Jesus Christ has come in the flesh* is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. *This is the spirit of the antichrist*, which you’ve heard is coming; even now it’s already in the world...This is how we know the Spirit of truth & the *spirit of deception.*” (1 John 2:2-3, 6).
- “Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the *coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.* *This is the deceiver & the antichrist.*” (2 John 7)
- John views “the *antichrist as a collective of deceptive false teachers already present* in [his Church] community.” – Duane Watson
- “In the Johannine epistles the antichrist is portrayed as a *spirit* (1 Jn. 4:3) or *collective force for evil* in the last days (1 Jn. 2:18). The *antichrist is plural*, representing all those who hold erroneous views of the person of Christ & were *already manifest in the church* at the time of [John’s] writing. In this case the antichrists are docetists who did not confess that Jesus the man was the divine Christ in the flesh. This portrayal [views] the antichrist as a collective of deceptive false teachers already present in the Johannine [Christian] community...[It] is an expression of Johannine realized eschatology in which *the age to come is already present.*” [Duane F. Watson, “Antichrist,” in Ralph P. Martin, *Op. cit.*, p.]

- John “regards the *spirit of the Antichrist as present among the [many] antichrists in the same way as the Spirit of Christ* (the ‘anointing’ 1 Jn. 2:27) ...*is present among Christians* [4:2-3] ... The Spirit honors John’s [view]...as the inspired Word of God to us... For John... this evil figure [*Antichrist*] *has already appeared in spirit* in those who oppose sound Christology & ethics.” [Richard J. Erickson, *Beginner’s Guide to NT Exegesis*, p. 212]
- 2 John 7 “The opposition against the confession that ‘Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ is characterized as the activity of the Antichrist... The pronoun [‘This one’] points back to ‘those who do not confess...’. This means that, as in 1 Jn. 4:1, *a group of deniers is identified as an activity of the Antichrist.*” [Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, p. 108]
- “2 Jn. 7... [argues] that ‘*many deceivers,*’ denying Christ’s incarnation, are in the world. 2 Jn. 7b implies that *they together constitute a corporate being*, i.e. the deceiver & *the Antichrist.*” [Mateusz K. Kusio, *cit.*, p. 137]

i. Is there a Climactic End-time Antichrist?

- ? John “regards *the prediction of the coming of the Antichrist as fulfilled.* There’s *no need to speculate further...*” — Bert Lietaert Peerbolte
- “The singular [‘Antichrist’] refers to *one personal embodiment of evil* to be manifested at the end of the age.”[HF. Paschall, HH. Hobbs (eds.) *Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (1972) p.] **Wrong! 1 Jn ‘many antichrists’**
- “Some...maintain that John might...envision a future & final antichrist... [But, John] identifies the *appearance of the Antichrist in the many* [‘opponents’] *that have left the author’s community.*” [Koester, *cit.*, p. 192 #6]
- “The identification of the ‘heretics’ [secessionists] as antichrists & the conclusion... — the end is near — imply that *the author identified the appearance of the ‘heretics’ [opponents] as the appearance of the Antichrist himself...* [This] means... the author regards *the prediction of the coming of the Antichrist as fulfilled.* There’s *no need to speculate further* [about] the coming of the Antichrist...” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, pp. 101-2]
- “In [1 Jn.] 4:3... the appearance of false prophets is interpreted as an activity of the Antichrist. In [1 Jn.] 2:1827 the *one Antichrist* who is heralded by tradition *is recognized in the many antichrists* that have come. *Nothing is said of any further activity of the Antichrist himself.* In [1 Jn.] 4:1-6 *the Antichrist* is presented as the one who *inspires those who oppose the true Christian confession*, & this activity shows that the *Antichrist has already come...*” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, pp. 105-6]
- “In 1-2 John the traditional *expectation of the Antichrist* is considered to be *fulfilled in the conflict that split the community...*” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, p. 113]
- “From the identification of the author’s *opponents as the Antichrist* it appears that *the author regarded the expectation of the Antichrist as having been realized.* From 1 Jn. 4:1-3 it seems apparent that it is *by the influence of his spirit that the Antichrist inspires opponents of Christ...* The concrete opposition... in the activity of ‘false prophets’ (4:1) is interpreted as the coming of the Antichrist (4:3). *The many antichrists* that have already come *are proof that the one Antichrist has arrived* (2:18). 2 Jn. 7 even identifies the opponents as ‘*this is the Antichrist.*’” [L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *cit.*, p. 109]
- ? “If the secessionists represent the antichrist ([Gk.] *antichristos*), now we learn that John’s Christians bear the anointing ([Gk.] *chrisma*) that can aid & protect them. *Antichristos* & *chrisma* originate from the same Greek verb, *chrio*, ‘to anoint.’” [Gary Burge, *1-3 John*, p. 128]

j. Applications

- When people leave the church is that always a bad sign? Was John discouraged because people left? Why not?
- Trouble happens in the Church. Don’t expect the church to be always peaceful, harmonious, & growing.
- The Church goes thro’ seasons –peaceful/growing & conflict/trial/split. John’s church is under spiritual attack.
- Can you go thro’ all seasons? Or will you ‘drop out’ or stay? Are you equipped to survive and persevere?
- Can you discern the spiritual forces behind church turmoil/conflict? Can you discern crucial/essential truths?

- The Church does not seek unity (including all views) at all costs. At times unity is sacrificed for the sake of truth
- **Table: Contrasts John's "Antichrist(s)" vs. Paul's "Man of Lawlessness (Sin)" (2 Thess. 2:1-12)**
- **John's "Antichrists"**
 - The Last Hour has come...now"
 - "Many antichrists"
 - Out of John's church(es)
 - Religious sphere: "Christians"
 - Deny/oppose: *anti*-Christ
 - Deny Christ came in flesh
 - Work via words (false prophets)
 - Deceiving the believers
 - "Spirit of Antichrist/Error"
- **Paul's "Man of Lawlessness(Sin)"**
 - 'The Day of the Lord' has... not come'
 - One – "*the man* of lawlessness..."
 - Out of the world
 - Political/Social sphere
 - Replace/substitute: *pseudo*-Christ
 - Seeks worship as god/God
 - False signs & wonders
 - Deceiving the unbelievers
 - "by Satan's Activity"