

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John

Lesson 4: Warning Against Antichrists -- 1 John 2:18–27

The word “antichrist” has had a long and dramatic career. It conjures images of a single sinister figure striding onto the world stage at the end of history, a villain to be identified and feared. Whole books and films have been built on the guessing game. So it comes as a jolt to open John’s letter and find him using the word in a far more ordinary, and far more unsettling, way.

“You have heard that antichrist is coming,” John writes, “so now many antichrists have come.” Not one, but many. Not in some distant future, but right now, in his own day. And not faceless strangers but people who had been part of the church: “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” The antichrist John worries about is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ, who denies the Father and the Son. The deceiver is not on the horizon; he has been sitting in the pew.

This is bracing, but it is also clarifying. John is not asking us to scan the news for a single end-times figure. He is teaching us to recognize a recurring spirit, present in his day and in ours, that whittles Jesus down, denies His deity, or refuses His incarnation. And he gives the church two great defenses against it: the truth they heard from the beginning, and the anointing they have received, the Spirit and the word that teach and keep them.

So this passage is not really about decoding the future. It is about holding fast in the present. John writes not to frighten his readers but to steady them. Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you, he says, and you will abide in the Son and in the Father. The defense against every deceiver is not cleverness but faithfulness: remaining in the truth about Jesus that we have known all along.

Group Discussion: John says many antichrists were already present in his day, and that they came out from within the church. Why is false teaching that arises from inside the community of believers often more dangerous than opposition from outside it?

Personal Reflection: John says the deceivers “went out from us, but they were not of us.” Have you ever seen someone walk away from the faith, or felt the pull yourself? What helps you keep abiding rather than drifting away?

Read 1 John 2:18–27

Study Questions

1. John says, “it is the last hour,” and that the presence of many antichrists is the proof of it (v. 18). What does John mean by “the last hour,” and how does the New Testament use this kind of language about the age in which we now live?

2. John writes about people who once seemed to belong but then “went out from us” (v. 19). Have you become complacent about your own continuance in the faith? What in this passage warns you against assuming you could never drift away?
3. John defines the antichrist plainly: “he who denies that Jesus is the Christ,” who “denies the Father and the Son” (vv. 22–23). What does this teach us about who the antichrists really are, and why does John locate the heart of their error in the denial of who Jesus is?
4. Many today are happy to admire Jesus as a teacher while denying that He is the divine Son and the only way to the Father. Where do you encounter that pressure, and have you ever softened your confession of Jesus to avoid conflict or to fit in?
5. John says, “No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also” (v. 23). What does this teach about the relationship between the Father and the Son, and why is it impossible to truly have God while rejecting Jesus?
6. John urges, “let what you heard from the beginning abide in you” (v. 24). What does it look like, in practical terms, to let the truth you first received take deep root and stay, especially in a culture that prizes the new and dismisses the old?
7. John says believers “have been anointed by the Holy One” and that this anointing “teaches you about everything” (vv. 20, 27). What is this anointing, and how do the Spirit and the apostolic word work to guard us from being deceived, without this meaning we no longer need teachers in the church?
8. John assumes his readers can recognize the truth and reject the lie. How carefully are you actually feeding on God’s word, so that you would recognize a counterfeit gospel if it were dressed up attractively in front of you?
9. John warns of deceivers who deny the incarnation and deity of Christ, and grounds the church’s safety in confessing the Son and abiding in the truth (vv. 22–27). Why is the confession that Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh, the dividing line of true faith, and what is finally at stake if it is surrendered?
10. Look back across this passage, from the warning about antichrists, to the call to abide in what you heard from the beginning. Name one specific way Jesus is calling you, through this passage, to hold fast to the truth about Him and to help guard others from being deceived.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 24:23–27, Jesus’ warning about false christs and false prophets; Acts 20:28–31, Paul’s warning that wolves would arise from among the elders themselves; 2 Peter 2:1–3, false teachers secretly bringing in destructive heresies; 2 John 7–11, deceivers who deny Jesus come in the flesh; Jude 3–4, contending for the faith once delivered to the saints.