

Week 4: John and Jude: The Antichrists

Hook

TRUE FAITH

Main Point: Christ is the only way to the Father.

In 1848, John Sutter was building a water-powered sawmill along the American River in Coloma, California. After discovering gold flakes in the streambed, those around the area resolved to keep the gold a secret. However, news quickly spread of the great value contained in the river. Over 300,000 Americans traveled to California during the California Gold Rush. The word of mouth about the value present simply could not be contained.

With such a massive interest in gold in the region, many new prospectors were confronted with an annoying truth about their new profession. The region also held large amounts of pyrite, an iron sulfide called fool's gold. This metal looked incredibly similar to gold, but it could not be smelted down to create jewelry. The frustration of the prospectors must have been immense as their moment of bliss turned quickly to disappointment.

Today, we'll study a major theme in 1 John. False teachers act as though they are teaching things of value, but it pales in comparison to the real thing. Even further, when you put the "fool's gold" they offer through "fire and pressure," it proves to be useless and damaging.

Q: What is an idea that seems valuable initially, but proves to be useless later?

Q: What are some ideas that might seem good at first but prove to be harmful?

RECAP: For the last two weeks, we have been talking about how God is the light and those who love Him will walk in the light, not in darkness. Walking in the light doesn't mean we do everything perfectly but just the opposite, that when we sin, the light purifies us. Walking in the light means abiding in Jesus so that we live the way He did. This week we look at what John wrote more specifically about the false teachers who had infiltrated the churches to whom he was writing. In this passage, he reminded these believers of the original Gospel they had heard – that Christ is the only way to the

Father and eternal life in His kingdom. Anyone teaching them anything different from that was an antichrist.

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1 John 2:18–23 and John 14:1–11 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Antichrists are at work, opposing Jesus.

Q: How did John know it was the “last hour”?

Q: How did John reassure his readers that they had the truth?

John told his readers that he knew it was the “last hour” because many “antichrists” had come. John’s use of the term “the last hour” doesn’t mean he necessarily believed Jesus was coming back right then. The “last hour” refers to the coming of the kingdom of God. As we saw in the last lesson, Jesus inaugurated the kingdom with His death and Resurrection (Redemption), but the kingdom has not yet come in all its fullness and will not until His Second Coming (Consummation). So this “last hour” refers to the time between His first and second comings, or the entire Church Age. The apostles didn’t know exactly when Jesus would return, just that He was coming “soon” (Revelation 22:7). But “soon” and “last hour” don’t necessarily mean right away when you’re dealing with a God to whom a day is like a thousand years (2 Peter 3:8).

This means we are also living in the “last hour,” even if Jesus doesn’t come back within the next few years or even our lifetime. Every generation since the apostles is part of the “last hour,” which explains why John described “many” antichrists, not just one. In our modern American Christian culture, we typically use the term “antichrist” to refer to a single enemy of God who will arise in the last generation, whom Christ will come back to defeat, the one whom Paul called the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12). But John used the word to refer to both the one final Antichrist and many others who oppose Christ in every generation of the Church Age.

The term “antichrist” is found in Scripture only in John’s letters and only four times (1 John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). Yet the way he spoke about it here assumes the term was being used in the church already; they were expecting “the” Antichrist (singular) to come in the last days. But John explained that because every generation in the Church Age is part of the “last hour,” every generation will have its own antichrists (plural) who will oppose Christ in its own times. Later, John said that everyone who denies Jesus has “the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 2:22; 4:3). Just as those who abide in Jesus have His Holy Spirit, so these antichrists have the spirit of the Enemy. This is how John could say that “any such person” is an antichrist (2 John 1:7).

John called these antichrists “liars” because they denied that Jesus is the Christ. He used this contrast of lies and truth to distinguish them from believers who “know the truth”

(2:21). They had separated themselves from the apostles and claimed to have a special knowledge, but John was reassuring his churches that they actually had the true knowledge because (as the literal Greek says) they “have the anointing from the Holy.” This is the contrast: They have the spirit of antichrist; you have the Holy Spirit. They are liars; you know the truth. Whoever confesses the Son really knows the Father, just as Jesus told the disciples at the Last Supper (John 14:6–11).

John wrote all of this to reassure the churches that the people who said they had a better or higher knowledge didn’t. Only those who know Jesus have the real truth. Again, this is all about relationship; “know” and “have” are relational words. Those who *know* Jesus *have* the Holy Spirit, *have* the Father, and *know* the truth because Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). True knowledge isn’t about knowing special truths; it’s about knowing The Truth and being in fellowship with Jesus, which is also what makes someone one of “us” (the apostles) or not.

First John 2:19 has a very repetitive structure in Greek. The false teachers left “us” because they were not “of us.” If they were “of us” they would have remained/abided with “us.” They did not abide in order that it would be made clear that they are not “of us.” It’s simple and repetitive because John was making it very clear, as if explaining it to “little children.” These false teachers separated themselves from the apostles because the apostles were the true body of Christ, and the false teachers weren’t “of” them. They weren’t in fellowship with Christ. They claimed to have special knowledge of God, but the only way to know the Father is through Jesus. This knowledge isn’t just information, it’s also a relationship. These liars didn’t have fellowship with Christ, therefore 1) they didn’t have fellowship with the body of Christ and 2) they didn’t know the Father.

These false teachers were physically in the church, but they weren’t “of us.” They weren’t true members of the body of Christ. They were deceivers who had infiltrated the Church to try to lead the believers astray (1 John 2:26), like wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15). John’s goal was to both reassure these believers that they had the truth and show them the false teachers in their midst. When we deal with false teachers in our midst who are trying to lead us astray, we can do the same thing – look to Jesus. Jesus is the truth. He is the standard. Those who are trying to lead us astray are antichrists, the opposite of Jesus.

Q: How can abiding in Jesus more deeply help us discern antichrists among us?

Q: What practical steps we can take to abide in Jesus more deeply?

Q: How does the anointing of the Holy Spirit help us to discern truth from lies?

1 John 2:24–25 and John 3:16–18 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Christ is the one who gives eternal life.

Q: How could these verses reassure the believers to whom John was writing?

Q: How would you summarize the Gospel for an unbelieving friend?

These verses are the natural conclusion of the section just before it. John had explained to them that these false teachers were clearly antichrists because they denied Jesus, which meant they didn't have special knowledge of God since knowledge of the Father can only come through Jesus. The ones who have knowledge of God are those who know Jesus, those who have been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, John's exhortation was to let the Gospel ("what you heard from the beginning") abide in you. Again, this creates a contrast between the message of the apostles and the message of these false prophets. The message of the apostles was the Gospel they had heard from the beginning. These false prophets left the apostles and started teaching something different – that they had a new special knowledge of God. John was reassuring the Church that this new message was not the message of Jesus, the one who gives eternal life. If you want eternal life, stick with Jesus, with His Gospel.

They were hearing these new teachings, these people trying to tell them they needed to do something different or more to get to God, but John told them to let the Gospel abide in them. Remain in them. Stay with them. They could rest in the truth of the Gospel. We don't need Jesus "plus" anything. Jesus is all we need.

John was reassuring these believers of their salvation. Regardless of what the false teachers were saying, whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life (John 3:16), keeping in mind that biblical "faith" (*pistis*) is not just intellectual belief or verbal confession but "trust," actively putting your trust in Jesus and following Him with your life. If that message "abides in you," then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. If you trust the Gospel for salvation, if you hold fast to that truth, trusting only in Christ for salvation, not anything else, then you will "abide" with Jesus. You will be in fellowship with Him. And if you are in fellowship with Jesus, you will be in fellowship with the Father. Rest assured, you don't need anything else for salvation.

Q: What other messages have you heard in the world, or even in some churches, that say you need "something else" in addition to Jesus in order to be saved?

Q: What kind of worries, doubts, and fears can those types of teachings cause?

Q: How can we recognize false teachings like this when we hear them?

1 John 2:26–29; 1 Corinthians 2:10–16; and Hebrews 4:14–16 [Read]

Talking Point 3: We can stand before the throne of God with confidence.

Q: How does “the anointing” (of the Holy Spirit) teach us?

Q: How can we approach the throne of a holy God with confidence?

In verse 26, John made it very clear that he was writing all of this to help them stand firm in the truth. He reminded them of the Gospel truth they originally heard and that it is Christ alone who saves them; they didn’t need anything else to be saved (2:24–25). But in this section, he also reassured them that they had “the anointing” of the Holy Spirit and didn’t need any other “special knowledge.”

This doesn’t mean we don’t need wise church leaders, pastors, teachers and elders who are more knowledgeable in the Scriptures to teach us. The Scriptures certainly support that (1 Timothy 4:13–16; 2 Timothy 2:2, 14, 24–25). John was doing that right here in this letter. What he was saying is that they already had the Holy Spirit, which is the only “special anointing” or “mystical experience” they needed. These false teachers were saying there was some extra spiritual experience or special knowledge they needed beyond the Holy Spirit, but John was reminding them that they already had the Holy Spirit. And because the Holy Spirit is God, the Spirit already has all the knowledge they could ever need.

The night before Jesus died, He told the disciples that when He left them and ascended to the Father, the Father would send the Spirit to “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). Because He is the Spirit of truth, He would guide them into all the truth (John 16:13). Paul explained that the Holy Spirit supernaturally teaches us by helping us to understand His Word (1 Corinthians 2:10–16). The Holy Spirit does not teach us something new or different beyond God’s Word, such as what the false teachers were teaching. But the Spirit does help us interpret God’s Word, giving us a supernatural understanding by His power (1 Corinthians 2:12–13). Because the Holy Spirit is God, He has the thoughts of God (1 Corinthians 2:11). Because we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we have the mind of Christ in us (1 Corinthians 2:16).

This is why John said we don’t need anyone else to teach us (1 John 2:27). Not that we don’t need human teachers who help us understand God’s Word but that we don’t need any other “special anointing” beyond the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Or any “special knowledge” beyond God’s written Word. Or any “special fellowship” with God beyond the fellowship that comes from abiding in relationship with Jesus. All of this was John’s assuring them that they didn’t need all the extra “next-level stuff” the false teachers were saying they needed. They had everything they needed in their relationship with the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – which they accessed through faith in Christ.

This meant they could have confidence before the throne of the Father when Christ comes again in judgment. They did not have to fear His return. This is apocalyptic language, talking about Christ’s return. When Jesus came the first time, He did not come

to judge the world but to save it (John 3:16–19). But when He returns, it will be to judge (Matthew 25:31–46; Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1). Those of us who abide in Christ will be judged as righteous because His righteousness has been given to us by His grace through faith (Romans 4). Therefore, we don't have to fear His coming. We can look forward to it with joyful anticipation. Even now, we can draw near to the throne of God with confidence to find mercy and grace in times of need (Hebrews 4:14–16).

Q: Describe any times you may have felt worried about whether you are really saved? What caused you to worry? How were you assured of your salvation?

Q: What should be our response to this assurance of our salvation?

Q: What difference can it make in your life to really know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are saved? How can that impact the way you live?

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Is there something your parents or a close family member taught you when you were younger that has proven true over the span of your lifetime? Perhaps when you were young, your mother told you that if you ate too many sweets, your stomach would ache. Or maybe your grandmother would recite Proverbs 27:17 (“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another”) and you have seen that as true in your LifeGroup and community. Just as the truths that were spoken and ingrained in us when we were younger have proven true, so we also must hold fast to the truths of the Gospel that we were given at the beginning of our salvation.

Q What is the most valuable thing your parents ever shared with you? How has it proven to be true over time?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think deeply about how much damage false teachings have done in the Church, particularly ones that require “something else” beyond Jesus to be saved. How have these false teachers hurt the message of the Gospel? How have they caused damage in people’s lives? How can we reassure people of the hope and assurance that is found in the Gospel? How can we continue to encourage people to live lives that please God and grow in sanctification without unintentionally putting “extra stuff” onto the Gospel?

PRAY a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God for the Gospel. Praise Him for His incredible mercy in making it so “easy” to be saved. Then pray for the strength and wisdom to live as though you are saved!

ACT: SHARE THE GOSPEL. John’s call to action for his readers was to let the Gospel message abide in them, to rest in the assurance of God’s grace and their salvation. If we are letting the Gospel abide in us, it should also be overflowing from us, shouldn’t it? If

we are confident that all we need to be saved is Jesus, we should be shouting it from the rooftops to everyone we know, right? Choose at least one person this week to share the simple truth of the Gospel with.

NEXT TIME in *1–3 John and Jude*: Next week, we'll get into specifics of some of the false teachings John was refuting in this letter, specifically false teaching about needing "extra stuff" beyond faith in Jesus to be saved.