

FIRST JOHN PART 4 "Many Antichrists Have Come"

1 John 2:18-27 and 4:1-6

We're continuing this morning in our study of the letter of First John. The Apostle John is writing at the end of the 1st C to Christians. It was probably among a group of house churches that this letter was circulated. As you know, I've been working the last several years on a book about the Bible as a unified story. I'm hoping to finish it up in 2022. This year I've been focusing my efforts on the epistles. That's everything between Acts and Revelation. The various writers – Paul, James, Peter, John, Jude and the writer of Hebrews – they're addressing real issues that are affecting real people. They're not just sitting down and writing a discourse in Christian theology. That old expression, "we all got problems" – it's true. We live in a fallen world and problems abound – for ALL of us! You have them and so do I. They had them back then too.

As I've been following the messages given by the various writers to the different churches and individuals (addressing a myriad of issues), one thing struck me: the Christians that made up the first century church were NOT "super saints" by any stretch of the imagination. They were real people like you and me. Just plain ordinary folks. Now here's the deep thought – just plain ordinary everyday people is exactly who God has chosen to use in order to accomplish His purposes here on earth. I suppose God could have chosen to use the host of heavenly angels to deliver the gospel message to the ends of the earth (He has used them on many occasions). Instead, He chose us. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... teaching them..." these words were spoken by Jesus to His eleven disciples. They then passed it on down the line and eventually we heard it. God knows what He's doing. I'm just thankful that I get to be in on what He is up to.

First John is one of these epistles, letters. As John pens these words that we've been looking at, he has certain churches and people in mind. But the Holy Spirit has preserved John's words to those people back then

for us here in Rockwall Texas in December of 2021. John has four purpose statements and I keep showing you these hoping that by repetition you'll be able to remember them. This is Q1 thru Q4.

The first reason John writes (1:4) is so that our joy may be complete. So, Q1 asks, "Why did John write this letter?" To promote JOY in us. It is so easy to become discouraged, hurt, angry, resentful, bitter, cynical – you fill in the blank. God wants us as His children to experience the "riches of His grace which He lavished upon us" (Eph 1). He wants us, as members of His family, to enjoy right now, today, all of our "spiritual blessings" in Christ. He wants us to be joy-filled people.

The second reason John writes (2:1) is so that we may not sin. So, Q2 asks, "Why did John write this letter?" To help us overcome our SIN problem. All of us Christians struggle with sin. Even though we have been saved by grace thru faith, we're still here in our human flesh. Many of the things of the world are attractive to us and the pursuit of these things may harm us physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. God knows this about us. He knows our carnal tendencies and has provided a way for us to deal with our sin.

The third reason John writes (2:26) is to warn us about deceivers. This is going to be the focus of our lesson this morning. So, Q3 asks, "Why did John write this letter?" To keep us firmly rooted in the TRUTH. What truth is that? God's truth. Where do we find God's truth? In God's word. We read it and then the Holy Spirit who indwells us guides us into applying it and He keeps us from straying away from it.

The fourth reason John writes (5:13) is to reassure believers. Q4 asks, "Why did John write this letter?" So that we would KNOW that we have eternal life. John says that we CAN know for sure that we're saved. If this is an area you struggle in, please come talk to me and I'll help you out. You need to be assured that you are saved.

Let's begin where we left off last time (2 weeks ago).

READ 1 John 2:18-22

Last time we established that the term "antichrist" as John uses it here is talking about anyone in any variety of forms who is against Christ and Christianity. In this section John contrasts true Christians from those who pretend to be Christians. At first glance certain people appear to be Christians, but John says they are actually "antichrists." He says there are many of them. A lot of them are in the church! They are the wheat among the tares (Matt 13:24-30). They are the wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). So do they. John contrasts these "antichrists," these pretenders, these false prophets from true Christians. The bottom line is that true Christians continue. What that means is that they remain faithful -- to the end. Back when we covered Hebrews Chapter 6 a month or so ago we talked about apostasy. This is what I showed you then. True Christians persevere. They endure. They are the overcomers that Revelation mentions. Antichrists, pretenders, those who are opposed to God and His truth, depart. They leave the faith. Many false prophets who founded the various cults started off their careers in the church *READ 1 John 2:19 again for emphasis.*

True Christians hold fast to Biblical truth. Antichrists deny the truth. True Christians affirm their faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as the Son of God, as their Savior and Lord. Those who are not really Christians deny these truths about Jesus and deceive others with wrong teachings about Jesus (not biblically based). Later in 2 John we'll hear these words: "Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." Various terms are used in the N.T. to describe these people: antichrists, pretenders, deceivers, false teachers, false prophets. *READ 1 John 2:22 again for emphasis.* Questions???

[AT THIS POINT BREAK OUT THE "CHRISTIAN" BOX]

The "Christian Box" – On each of the crayons is a name of a group or prominent individual who speaks for a particular belief system... Notice the variety out there all claiming to be "Christians." In Matthew 7:15 Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but

inwardly are ravenous wolves." Some prophets are true prophets (sheep) and some are false prophets (wolves). Some we have questions about. It's hard to tell if they're the real deal or not. These guys and gals may look and talk really nice and sound legitimate. They may seem to be genuine. We're going to talk later about the tests we can use to determine who's a sheep and who's a wolf. On your handout, Q5, I have asked you to write down 3 names of "Christians" – one who you believe is a "genuine Christian," one you are pretty sure is a "deceiver" (not the real thing) and one who you frankly are "not sure about." So pass these around and look at them and pick out one from each category and write their name on your sheet in the appropriate place. We'll discuss toward the end of class.

READ 1 John 2:23

There's this interconnection between the Father and the Son. John is reiterating what he heard Jesus teach years before. In the Gospel of John Jesus mentions the Father 99 times. Here are just a few quotes: "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (5:23); "The Father who sent Me bears witness of Me" (8:18); "I and the Father are one" (10:30); "I am in My Father" (14:20). Here's the deal: You cannot have the Son without the Father or vice versa. Yes, there are 3 Persons of the Trinity, but they are interconnected. They are one. You cannot have One without the others.

READ 1 John 2:24

"In the beginning" here refers to when you first believed, when you came to know Christ. The Gospel hasn't changed since then. Jesus hasn't changed. And the truths we learned about Jesus remain constant: He loves us, He died to save us, He came back to life and rose from the grave. He holds us securely in His hand, He's gone to prepare a place for us and He's coming back again for us. Many of us learned all of this as young children in VBS or at church camp or as teenagers in SS class. Then we grew up and real life happened! Enter the voices of the liberal media, worldly philosophies, out-in-left-field TV preachers. Don't let all the garbage that

the world bombards you with influence what you know to be true from here (Bible). You KNOW the truth. You ACCEPTED the truth. You BELIEVED the truth. And that truth HAS NOT changed!

READ 1 John 2:25

You can know that you have eternal life. This will get emphasized later on in our study of First John. What's the very first verse in the Bible that you memorized as a kid? John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." What an amazing promise!

READ 1 John 2:26

Here we have one of John's purpose statements that I read earlier. There are people out there who don't believe what the Bible says about Jesus and they will try to tell you something different. Don't listen to them!

READ 1 John 2:27

"The anointing that you received" refers back to verse 20-21: "You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge" – you know the truth because you have the Holy Spirit guarding and guiding you into the truth. That same Holy Spirit who inspired the original writing of Scripture, He is the One who teaches you! I'd say He's a pretty good tutor!

Questions??

The N.T. is filled with many warnings about false prophets. READ Mark 13:21-23. Do you think some of these "false christs" Jesus talked about could be among these so-called Christians (crayons)? I think so!

READ Romans 16:17-18 and 2 John verse 7

Warning after warning after warning... False prophets were a problem in the 1st Century, have been throughout church history and they are still a BIG problem today... only now they have a greater platform with social media and 500 channels of TV!

OK, it's time for what I call, "Is It A Sheep or A Wolf" Test. How can we tell a sheep from a wolf? How can we distinguish a true prophet of God, a real Christian who believes and speaks the truth from a false prophet, a pretender, a deceiver? How?

READ 1 John 4:1

John says, "TEST the spirits." Is it the spirit of truth or the spirit of error? Here's the test...

Test #1 READ 1 John 4:2-3

Test #1 is the Christology Test. Who is Jesus? A true prophet will confess Jesus Christ as God who came in human flesh.

Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully human. He is God (He said that He and the Father are one), which means He was not a created being. He was human – he took on human flesh and lived on this earth for 33 years. But He existed as God from eternity past. Any teaching other than that Jesus was both fully God and fully man is false and the one who teaches it is a wolf, a false teacher. Don't listen to them.

Test #2 READ 1 John 4:4 "Little children, you are from God [YOU ARE SAVED] and have overcome them [FALSE TEACHERS], for he who is in you [THE HOLY SPIRIT] is greater than he who is in the world."

Later in this same letter John will talk about the Holy Spirit being given to us. READ 1 John 3:24 and 1 John 4:13.

Test #2 is the Regeneration Test. If you are a true Christian you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He lives in you. He protects you. He helps you to discern the truth from a lie.

One of the biggest lies of the wolves is that you are saved by your own effort. You have to DO something to earn your salvation. They'll say things like, "You must speak in tongues or be baptized or say so many hail Mary's or get absolution from a priest, live a certain way or whatever in order to

become acceptable to God.” That’s NOT what the Bible teaches! If you read your N.T. and listen to the Holy Spirit, this will become clear to you. We are saved by grace thru faith in Christ alone. And as His children we are taught that we should act as His children. But any works-based message of salvation is false and the one who teaches it is a wolf, a false prophet, false teacher, deceiver, antichrist.

Test #3 READ 1 John 4:5-6

Test #3 is the Scripture Test. When John says “we are from God” and the one who knows God “listens to us,” who is the WE and US he is referring to? It’s the apostles and the N.T. writers – John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, the writer of Hebrews and the writers of the gospels.

Any message that is contrary to Scripture is false and the one who teaches it is a wolf, a deceiver, a liar. Stay away from them!

In summary, there are 3 tests, three basic questions you can ask that will help you discern a sheep, a true prophet of God from a wolf, a false prophet: (1) Who do they say Jesus is? (2) How do they claim you are saved? (3) Does their message agree with the teachings in the Bible?

Application: It is not always so easy to determine a wolf from a sheep. It requires some research on our part. So do your homework! Ask the right questions. Be watchful and diligent.