

A WARNING AGAINST ANTICHRISTS

Study Guide for 1 John 2:18–21

Based on the exposition of the biblical text

KEY TEXT

“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared. From this we know that it is the last hour.”

— 1 John 2:18

Overview

John writes to prepare the first-century church—and us—for the reality of antichrists. These are false teachers who oppose or misrepresent Jesus Christ. The sermon unfolds in three clear points:

1. **The Period of Antichrist** (v. 18)
2. **The Particulars of Antichrist** (v. 19)
3. **The Protection from Antichrist** (vv. 20–21)

I. The Period of Antichrist (v. 18)

A. A Personification

John affirms that a future, fully-matured antichrist is coming—a personal embodiment of opposition to Christ. Paul describes this figure as “the man of lawlessness” who will exalt himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

Key Insight: The many antichrists present now are forerunners of the one still to come (John Stott).

B. A Plurality

John emphasizes that “many antichrists have appeared.” An antichrist is any person or system that reduces, distorts, or replaces the true Christ.

What is the “last hour”?

- Not a literal 60 minutes, but the entire church age—the period between Christ’s first and second coming.
- It began at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–17) and continues until the return of Christ.
- Confirmed by Peter, Paul, and the writer of Hebrews as already present.

Where do antichrists arise?

- From within the visible church: “They went out from us” (v. 19).
- Paul warned the Ephesian elders: “From among your own selves’ men will arise, speaking perverse things” (Acts 20:30).
- They spread “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

MODERN FORMS OF ANTICHRIST ERROR

- Obvious: Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam—systems that deny the full deity or true humanity of Christ.
- Subtle (often within evangelical circles): Teaching that Jesus is primarily a means to financial success; that Christians are “little gods”; that the Christian life guarantees freedom from sorrow, suffering, or poverty; or that alters Jesus’ mission from Savior from sin to savior from discomfort.

II. The Particulars of Antichrist (v. 19)

A. Abandonment of the Gospel

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us.” Their physical departure revealed a prior spiritual departure from the gospel.

Marks of gospel abandonment:

- Denial or distortion of the person of Christ (fully God and fully man).
- Denial of His substitutionary death and resurrection.
- Rejection of the purpose of redemption—to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).
- Failure to “receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

B. Abandonment of the Church

Gospel defection leads to outward separation. These antichrists were part of the visible church but never part of the invisible church—the true body of Christ.

Important doctrine: Perseverance of the Saints

- Those truly born of God will remain: “If they were of us, they would have remained with us.”
- Jesus promises: “I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish... no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).
- Defection does not prove salvation lost; it reveals salvation was never present.
- *John Stott: “They share our earthly company but not our heavenly birth.”*

III. The Protection from Antichrist (vv. 20–21)

A. Inward Graces — The Anointing

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.”

What is this anointing?

- The work of the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to the glory of Christ in the gospel.
- A sovereign grace that cements gospel truth in the heart.
- Irreversible: No one who truly sees the glory of Jesus walks away from Him.
- The Spirit seals believers until the day of redemption.

B. Instilled Truths — Knowledge of the Truth

“I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

Why truth protects:

- Biblical ignorance is the mother of error.
- Truth unmask heresy and illuminate’s error.
- The church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).
- Believers who know the truth cannot be easily deceived by false systems.

Discussion Questions

1. How does understanding the “last hour” as the entire church age (rather than a distant future period) change the way we live and guard against deception today?
2. John says antichrists “went out from us.” Why is it significant that false teaching often arises from within the church rather than only from outside?

3. What are some contemporary teachings or movements that subtly alter the person or work of Christ? How can we recognize them?
4. How does the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints comfort believers, and how does it challenge those who may be relying on external religious activity?
5. What practical steps can you take to deepen your Spirit-given knowledge of the truth—so that you are better protected against error?
6. John Stott wrote that endurance is “the hallmark of the saved.” How have you seen perseverance (or the lack of it) evidenced in your own life or in the lives of others?

Personal Application

Reflect on the following and write your responses:

- **Examine:** Is there any teaching I have accepted that diminishes or distorts the biblical Christ?
- **Evaluate:** Am I regularly feeding on the truth of Scripture so that error becomes obvious by comparison?
- **Engage:** How can I lovingly help others who may be drifting toward antichrist teaching?
- **Endure:** What does remaining faithful to Christ and His church look like in my current season of life?

Memory Verse

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth.”

1 John 2:20–21

Closing Reflection

We live in the last hour. Antichrists are present. The warning John gave to the first-century church remains urgent today. The same Spirit who anointed those early believers anoints us. The same truth that protected them protects us. Let us therefore cling to Christ, know His Word, and remain steadfast until He comes.

Amen.