

Who Is the Real Enemy?

by

Richard Pectol

“Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now may antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us. 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. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son . . .” (1 John 2:18-27).

ONE of the difficulties our troops had in Vietnam was knowing who the real enemies were when they went into jungle warfare with the Vietnamese. They could not tell by physical appearance whether a man was a friend or foe.

Christians have a similar problem. The apostle Paul said, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Peter put it like this: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We are not fighting with people, “flesh and blood.” Our warfare is not against Communists or atheists. It is with spiritual wickedness in high places. Peter put it even more succinctly when he said our war is with the devil. He is the adversary.

In the heart of our discussions of what is right and wrong we often forget who the enemy is. At times we act as if God were the enemy. “If you do this,” we say, “God will get you. He will send you to hell.” God is our friend, not our enemy. He loves us; He wants to save us.

Who is the enemy? The devil. Our disagreements among ourselves should be nothing more that disagreements on how to fight the devil. We are friends. We are bound together by God who loves us. The devil is the only real enemy we have. He is our adversary; he is our slanderer.

I. THE FEARFUL WARNING

First John 2:18-22 speaks of our real enemy, the Antichrist. When I was growing up, before and during the World War II, the Antichrist was Adolph Hitler. During the Cold War days, it was Joseph Stalin. Down through the years, people have had their favorite identification of the Antichrist.

John says, “Children, it is the last hour . . .” (2:18). No definite article is found in the Greek. It is a “last time” type of situation. He does not mean the last time in the sense that these are the last few days before the second coming. But, he is saying, “This is the kind of time that is characteristic of ‘end time’ situations.”

He further says, “And just as you heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen” (2:18). The Antichrist is not one person who will come at the end of the age. Many Antichrists have and will come.

John says, “From this we know that it is the last hour” (2:18). Christians have always lived in critical times. As we look about today, we are ready to conclude that this must be the worst of all times. Someone tried to tell me the other day, “I know Jesus is fixin’ to come right away because this is the worst time the world has ever known.” We do not know that it is really the
worst. Every age has been critical for the Christian.

In verse 19, he says, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us.” Two kinds of people leave the church. One kind is the person who is truly converted to Jesus but fell away through some temptation of the flesh, some false doctrine, some weakness, or some carelessness. Others leave who never were really of us. It is the second kind of which John speaks.

John says, “For if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us” (2:19). Certain people are Anti-christs. They are in the church for a while, but they are opposed to Christ and the doctrine of salvation. They have never really accepted what the Bible says. These people are going to eventually leave.

“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know” (2:20). I used to have difficulty with this passage because I knew one man who did not know everything. As I looked around at other Christians, it was apparent to me that they did not know everything either. But John says, if you have this anointing, you know all things. What does he mean? He is using the word knowledge in the common Hebrew and Jewish sense of experiential knowledge. He does not mean that you know all the facts of the Word. He does not mean that you do not have any more to learn. He is saying that you can have all knowledge. You do not need any special revelation or some gnostic, mystical insight. You have the anointing, the ability to know. You can experience the truth yourself.

Verse 21 says, “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.” No matter how beautiful a lie might be pictured, no matter what kind of philosophical and logical system it may be a part of, it is not true, it is a lie. No lie is of the truth.

It is against Christ to say that a few people have a kind of special insight into the truth and others cannot. Everybody who knows Christ can understand Christ. That truth ought to be a great consolation to us.

It is true that some people have a higher I.Q. than others. They may be a little sharper and may learn a little quicker. It is also true that some people have a better education than others. They have more ability to teach and learn. But when it comes to knowing God and Christ, no one has an inside track. Anyone who knows God’s revelation can know and experience God. The man with the greater education, the greater ability, may have greater insight and more technical knowledge. He may be able to influence more people, but any man can experience a deep relationship with God. The man who has little education but does the best he can, can experience a life with God even as much as one who has far greater ability.

II. THE SPECIFIC IDENTIFICATION

John says: “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” (2:22). These people were not saying that Jesus was not a prophet. They were not even saying that Christianity was not the true religion. They were not saying that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God. But they were saying, in substance, when you talk about Jesus and Christ, you are speaking of two different beings.

When I was getting my master’s degree in the ’60s, liberal theologians were talking about the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith, as if they were two separate beings. John says Jesus is the Christ. The historical Jesus—the one who was at the wedding feast in Cana, the one who talked to the woman at the well, the one who stood on the mountain and preached the Sermon on the Mount, the one who stood on the Sea of Galilee and told those parables—is the Christ. He says anyone who denies this truth is a liar. He is an Antichrist.

Next, John says, “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also” (2:23). You cannot have God without Jesus and you cannot have Jesus without God. These people were thinking, “Jesus was a divine preacher. He came from God, but He was not really equal with God.” John says anyone who denies the deity of our Lord is against Christ.

“As for you, let that abide in you” (2:24). The same Greek word appears three times in this verse, but it is translated by three different English words in the KJV. It has, “Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the
beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.” (Italics mine.) The words *abide, remain,* and *continue* are translations of one word. He is saying, “You have learned from the beginning the truth that Jesus is the Christ and is one with the Father. If you continue in this teaching, you will continue in the Father. But when you give up this teaching, you have given up Christianity.”

A few years back the expression “Secular Christianity” appeared. I even have a book in my office entitled “Christian Atheism.” An impossibility! A man cannot be an atheist and a Christian at the same time. Any man who really believes in God is going to believe in Christ; any man who really believes in Christ is going to believe in God. The two go together. Anything that detracts from that truth is antichrist.

### III. THE BEAUTIFUL PROMISE

A wonderful characteristic about John is that no matter how severely he might be rebuking and how strongly he might be insisting on sound doctrine, he always shows us a beautiful promise. He says, “And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life” (2:25). I do not know exactly what these first century people believed, but by the second century the Gnostics had developed a very complicated theory in which they believed that God and Christ were far removed from each other. God was so good that He could not have anything to do with man. Thus, He created a special being, Jesus, to have a special relationship with man. But John says the beauty of the coming of Jesus is that God is giving us eternal life through Him. God has had something to do with you. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:19. The promise of eternal life is ours. The reason we avoid all evil is because God has made a promise that He wants to keep.

The enemy is the devil, not God. God is not standing over us with a ball bat, waiting for an opportunity to send someone to hell. He is trying to give us eternal life. He is our friend. He is your friend even when the preacher lets you down. He is your friend when the elders make mistakes. He is your friend even when Mom and Dad do not quite understand. He is always your friend. He offers you eternal life. Even if you lose your soul forever, it will not be because He is your enemy.

John gives a specific warning about your real enemy. He says, “These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you” (2:26). Look at the plural “those.” Satan is the enemy. But he does not come creeping into your bedroom wearing a red suit—with horns, a pointed tail, and a pitchfork. He seduces you through “them.” He comes to you through a friend. Your enemy is the devil, but he seduces you through “them.”

John says:

> And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (2:27, 28).

You do not need any man to teach you. He is saying that the truth is the truth and you should not let someone persuade you to believe something that is not part of the truth. You do not need any further revelation. You do not need any mystical insight. You do not have to have any special training other than the knowledge of what has been revealed.

Do you know where we get into trouble in the church? With the phrase “I think.” Have you ever said, “I think it would be all right if I do this. I know the Bible condemns it, but I think it would be all right on this one occasion.” When we move away from what God has revealed, from the anointing that He has given us, we fall into the hands of the enemy. Whether it is immorality, false teaching, indifference to the truth, or cantankerous and unkind attitudes, when we abandon what God has said about Himself, Christ, and the truth, we have become a prisoner of war. We belong to the enemy. We are still God’s children, but we are prisoners of war.

### CONCLUSION

Who is the enemy? The church is not the enemy. The preacher is not the enemy. Preachers can make mistakes and hurt feelings, but they are not your enemy. The elders are not your enemies. Moms and dads are not your enemies. They make mistakes. They may even hurt your feelings unnecessarily, but they are not your
enemies. You may think you are neglected by the church, but the church is not your enemy. God is the best friend you have ever had. The real enemy is Satan. The war is not between different sects and beliefs of Christians. It is not even between the true church and false churches. It is certainly not between brethren in the church. The war is between God and Satan, Christians and the devil. God has chosen us. We are His people. Know where your allegiance is and know who your enemy is.

You could not have a worse enemy than Satan. He will attack you any way he can. He does not believe in any rules of warfare. Even the most ungodly nations in our world have a few principles regarding warfare. But Satan does not have any reservations at all. He will overcome you any way he can. He will use your friends to persuade you. He will try to get you to believe something that is false. He will attempt to make you indifferent or disappointed. He will try to use you to make trouble in the church. He will use you anyway he can.

God is your friend. Sometimes you may have to make some tremendous sacrifices to serve Him. You may be ridiculed by some of your friends. You may have to make a financial sacrifice. Some of us may even be called upon to give our lives. But remember: When you make a sacrifice for God, it is always for your benefit, not His. He is your friend. He is never your enemy. He loves you. He wants you to have the abundant life. Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”