

Covenant History Series
Second John—Beware of the Antichrist

Sunday, December 6, 2009

Introduction

- I. The author
 - A. He refers to himself simply as **The elder** (v. 1)
 - B. For various reasons this is thought to be the apostle John
 - 1. Similarity of content, vocabulary, and style to the other N.T. works attributed to him
 - 2. The earliest and by far the strongest tradition we find in the ancient church

- II. The recipient
 - A. **The elect lady and her children** (v. 1)
 - 1. Some think this is a reference to a particular church and its members. Why would they think this?
 - a. The Greek word for church (ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*) is a feminine noun, and so the church might figuratively be addressed as a woman
 - b. In addition to this, the church, which is composed of the elect (Matt. 24:22, 24, 31; Lk. 18:7; Rom. 8:33; 11:7; 2

Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1), is sometimes referred to under the figure of the bride of Christ (Eph. 5; Rev. 21)

2. Others think, as I do, that it is better to understand the letter as being addressed to a specific, though unnamed, Christian woman and her children
- B. How we interpret this affects how we understand verse 13, **The children of your elect sister greet you.**
 - C. On the whole it is best to understand the phrase literally, and suppose that John addressed the letter to a particular Christian woman.
 1. Who she was, and what his relationship to her was is unknown, but it is probably the case that she was a prominent [i.e., *wealthy*] Christian woman in one of the churches of Asia
- III. The purpose for writing (intro in the ESV)
- A. He wrote the letter “to warn against the same false teaching that he spoke of in 1 John. This letter, however, was addressed to a Christian woman and her family, and focused on Christian hospitality. False teachers were using the kindness of Christians to gain influence within John’s congregations. John’s letter spoke of this danger and warned against opening one’s home to these destroyers of the faith.” (ESV, Introduction to 2 John)
- IV. Read **vv. 1-5**
- A. “That we love one another”
 - B. Fine, but what does love look like? What does it mean to love another?
- V. **This is love, that we walk according to his commandments** (v. 6)
- A. Love is not something you feel, it’s something you do. Love is defined by God’s law, by his commandments. If you say you love your neighbor but don’t keep God’s commandments with respect

to how you act toward him, you're a liar. (Second commandment; Golden Rule)

VI. **For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the antichrist** (v. 7)

- A. We need to spend a little time here because there is a great deal of confusion about the identity of the antichrist. This confusion is fueled in part some popular literature about the end times.

The common view, popularized by men like Hal Lindsey (*The Late Great Planet Earth*) and Tim LaHaye (*Left Behind*) is that there is coming a world ruler who will be a kind of counterfeit Christ. They take the prefix anti to mean "in the place of," so that the antichrist is a pseudo-Christ, a false Christ.

They teach that he will be the leader of a revived Roman Empire, or at least over a confederation of nations that currently take up the territory of the old Roman Empire.

Supposedly this figure will suffer a mortal wound but will miraculously recover; or that he will actually die and be resurrected, mimicking the resurrection of Christ.

He will have the power to perform signs and wonders.

He will exercise a world-wide tyranny, by requiring people to worship him, or to worship an image of his likeness. This will consist in part of having a computer chip imbedded under the skin with the number of his name, the dreaded 666.

Although initially making peace with Israel, he will end up breaking his treaty and seek to annihilate the Jews. This will lead to the battle of Armageddon when Christ returns to save Israel.

There are a number of problems with all of this, however. In the first place, the Bible doesn't speak of "the antichrist," as if there is just one. Rather, it speaks of antichrists...in the plural. There is not one, but many antichrists.

You have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come (1 Jn. 2:18).

Notice two things: the use of the plural (antichrists); and the time frame (they had already come in John's day).

Who is he talking about? He tells us in the following verses.

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?
This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son"
(1 Jn. 2:22)

He is talking about those who teach what is false about Jesus Christ, specifically those who deny that he is the Christ, as he makes clear in 4:3.

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 Jn. 4:2-3)

Then 2 John 7 he says,

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

These are all the passages in which the word *antichrist* appears. And it is clear that he is speaking about false teachers, false prophets, who are teaching fundamental errors about Jesus. What were the errors? (Jewish denial that Jesus was the Messiah; or Gnostic separation of the Christ from the man, Jesus. In either case it was a grievous error.)

So the first problem with the commonly accepted view the antichrist is that the Bible doesn't speak of just one, but of many antichrists.

The second is problem is that the Bible doesn't present the antichrist as a political leader, a world-ruler, but as a religious teacher, a false prophet.

Third, the popular view of the antichrist takes elements from several different passages of the Bible, speaking of several different individuals, and rolls them all into one. The view takes

passages from the book of Daniel, which prophetically speak of Antiochus Epiphanes, a Syrian ruler who persecuted the Jews about a century and a half before Christ; and passages from the book of Revelation, which speak of the Roman Emperor Nero, who persecuted the early church in the first century; and then these passages from John's epistles that speak of false prophets and teachers—and puts them all together to form one composite figure. But the passages don't go together. They're not speaking of the same person.

The fourth problem with the common view is the time element with respect to all these figures. The passages are not speaking about figures who are yet to appear—i.e., who are still in *our* future—but about those who have already come and gone.

VII. **Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward** (v. 8)

- A. Some are uncomfortable with this idea of reward, as if it smacks of the notion of the merit of works. But the Scriptures frequently speak of our being rewarded. But consider the following passages:

The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full **reward** be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" (Ruth 2:12)

Mankind will say, "Surely there is a **reward** for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth" (Ps. 58:11)

The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure **reward** (Prov. 11:18)

The **reward** for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Prov. 22:4)

Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his **reward** is with him, and his recompense before him (Isa. 40:10)

Behold, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to the daughter of Zion, "Behold, your salvation comes; behold, his **reward** is with him, and his recompense before him" (Isa. 62:11)

Thus says the Lord: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a **reward** for your work, declares the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy (Jer. 31:16)

Rejoice and be glad, for your **reward** is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:12)

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will **reward** you (Matt. 6:6)

The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's **reward**, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's **reward**. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his **reward**" (Matt. 10:41-42)

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your **reward** will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil (Lk. 6:35)

If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a **reward**. (1 Cor. 3:14)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your **reward**. You are serving the Lord Christ (Col. 3:24)

These are only a small sampling of passages that deal with the subject, but they should suffice to show that there is a reward for serving the Lord.

- B. There are some who sound very spiritual who say we should never have an eye toward being rewarded.
 - 1. Pray tell, why then is the fact that the righteous will be rewarded mentioned so often? If God doesn't want us to be

motivated by the hope of a reward, why does he even bring it up?

2. Hebrews **11:24-26** (cf. **10:35**)
3. Even Jesus looked toward the reward promised him by the Father (**Heb. 12:1-2**)
4. **Hebrews 11:6**
5. And so John says, "Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward" (v. 8)

VIII. **Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son** (v. 9)

- A. The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3; Heb. 13:8; Col. 2:7)

IX. **If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works** (vv. 10-11)
Withholding hospitality from those who teach error

- A. Hospitality in the ancient world (in general and to itinerant teachers)
- B. To show hospitality to these false prophets and teachers out of a misplaced sense of compassion is to help them spread their false teaching

Finis

