

We Have Spiritual Discernment

1 John 2:18–29

Introduction

In verse 20, the Divine Author, God, reveals to us that we have received an anointing or, as some versions translate it, an unction. I remember hearing some old preachers pray for an unction to function. Often you will hear people pray for preachers that they will have an anointing while preaching. In this text, we are not talking about preachers. We are reading about every Christian. God has given you an unction—an anointing. In the Old Testament, anointing took place by pouring oil on a person to commission them for a specific task. Prophets, priests, and kings were anointed. In the New Testament, anointing referred to the Holy Spirit coming to live inside of believers.

- If you have believed the claims of Christ, you have this anointing.
- If you have been forgiven of a debt you could not pay, you have received this anointing.
- If you have ever realized how blatantly your sin is an affront to God and that without Christ you are bound for hell—not for a moment, or even a minute, or even a millennium, but for eternity—if you have realized that and have been truly converted to Christ, you have this anointing.

This anointing is certainly the possession of the Holy Spirit. It is also something more. It is something that the Holy Spirit gives every believer. It is spiritual discernment. The Greek word is *chrisma*. So, figuratively, the anointing refers to the Holy Spirit and, practically, it refers to spiritual discernment. Notice verses 20 and 27; this spiritual discernment helps you live the Christian life. It helps you to determine the good from the evil.

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

But the anointing which you have received of him abides in you, and you do not need that any one teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in him.

Transition: It is vital that we put into effect this gift from God. We must exercise this spiritual discernment everyday.

1. Spiritual Discernment helps you know the Antichrist is coming to deceive (1 John 2:18).

1 John 2:18 says, “Little children, it is the last hour: and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come; by which we know that it is the last hour.”

Hour – John is confident that the Antichrist is coming because it is the “last hour.” Time is running out. The Antichrist is punctual. He will not arrive early because God will not allow him to come onto the stage of human history before it is his time. He will not arrive late because God is carrying out a plan for the redeemed people of all the ages and He needs the Antichrist to come at a certain time.

John poses a question that we frequently ask: “What time is it?” It is answered, not by saying 11:00 o’clock or 12:00 o’clock, but by saying, “It’s Antichrist time.”

The phrase “last hour” does not refer to a sixty-minute time slot, but to a period of time. It may be better for us to substitute “last hour” with “last days.” We are living in a time-period called the last days. The last days began nearly two thousand years ago and will continue until Jesus comes back to earth. It is the time period between Christ’s first coming and His second coming.

In Knoxville, Sarah and I would often have people over for dinner. The kids were always excited when we would have guests over. They would ask, “Is it time yet?” and we would say, “Any minute now we will hear the doorbell ring.” Let’s ask John if it is time for the Antichrist to visit our world. He responds, “You will hear the doorbell at any moment.” John was good at telling time. He was a spiritual clock-watcher, and you should be too.

Antichrist – We know that the Antichrist was coming when John was alive, and he is still coming today. Most Bible versions do not capitalize the word antichrist, but I like how the New King James and the Holman Christian Standard Bible do. John is using a singular noun referring to a particular person. His name is Antichrist. My name is Kyle, and when it is written it is always capitalized. His name is Antichrist, and when it is written it should be capitalized.

So who is this Antichrist? We’re given a few clues as to this coming world dictator: he will survive a mortal wound to his head; he will rise to great political power; his acceptance by

world religions, including both Muslims and Jews, will be nothing short of miraculous; even the clue that the numerical equivalents to the letters in his name add up to 666.¹

People have made all sorts of wild and strange speculations as to who he is. I have read names from Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mussolini, the Pope (Which one? All of them), Hitler, Stalin, and Bill Clinton. Let me highlight a few possible candidates for you.

Prince Charles of Wales could have been the Antichrist. He had links to the Roman Empire and some have reported that he was a vegetarian. This would explain why the daily animal sacrifices will stop in the future Jewish Temple, right?²

Since the days of George Washington, about every U.S. President has made the suspect list for the Antichrist. By the way, the Antichrist is a male. Just thought I would throw that in for Father's Day. Now your wives are really wondering about you. No, seriously, he is a male. So if Hillary Clinton is elected President, do not bring me any pamphlets pointing to her as the Antichrist.

Ronald Wilson Reagan has garnered a lot of attention in this area. He was the most popular President to ever live. His charisma led him to win both elections by a landslide. In 1980, he won every state but seven, and in 1984 he won every state besides one. Not only his charisma screamed he was the Antichrist, but his name did too. Ronald Wilson Reagan has six letters a piece: that equals 666. When Reagan retired, he moved to 666 St. Cloud Road. Get this: he even survived a mortal wound—although not to the head. But when you're convinced already, do not let the facts get in your way.

John F. Kennedy was another candidate. He was the first Roman Catholic President. He was believed to move according to the Pope's bidding. In 1956 at the Democratic Convention, he received 666 votes. Tragically, Kennedy was shot in Dallas, and many people waited for him to return from the dead and prove his true identity as the Antichrist.

What about Barack Obama? Many preachers are delivering sermons naming the current President as Antichrist. On the Sunday before President Obama's election, Robert Jeffress,

¹ Stephen Davey, "Antichrists in the Assembly," Colonial Baptist Church, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/20130421-am.pdf>.

² Todd Strandberg, "The Antichrist: Have You Seen This Man," Rapture Ready, accessed March 28, 2016, <https://www.raptureready.com/rr-antichrist.html>.

senior pastor at the First Baptist Church in Dallas, said that if President Obama were elected his victory would lead to the reign of the Anti-Christ.

I want you to hear me tonight, I am not saying that President Obama is the Antichrist, I am not saying that at all. One reason I know he's not the Antichrist is the Antichrist is going to have much higher poll numbers when he comes...President Obama is not the Antichrist. But what I am saying is this: the course he is choosing to lead our nation is paving the way for the future reign of the Antichrist.³

Who can blame Robert Jeffress? Listen to this evidence: the day after the election, the daily pick-three lottery number in Obama's home state of Illinois was "6-6-6." How clear can it be? It does lead us to consider why so many people believe the Antichrist will be an American President.

We Americans are so consumed with ourselves. We forget about men like the Roman Emperor Nero. If I were living in his day, I would definitely have him at the top of my list. He killed Christians violently and horrifically. He would even put Christians on a post to burn them so he would have light at night. It is interesting though that most of our suspicions lead us to Americans living in our lifetime.

Here is what you need to know about the Antichrist. He is also called in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 the “man of lawlessness”; in Daniel 9:27, the prince is a rival to Christ; and John uses another name for him in the Book of Revelation and calls him the beast from the sea (Revelation 13).⁴

Your spiritual discernment tells you he is coming and may already be on the scene. You have heard me correctly: the pseudo-Christ, the Devil’s darling, the Satanic superman, the counterfeit Christ will arrive right on time. He will *deceive* the masses, and I doubt he will be on any “Name the Antichrist list.” Church, I want you to hear me: whether he is alive or not, I cannot, will not, and should not speculate. Neither should you.⁵

Transition: Spiritual discernment helps you know the Antichrist is coming, and it also . . .

³ Joe Carter, “The 7 Most Popular Contenders for the Title ‘Antichrist,’” *The Gospel Coalition*, November 16, 2012, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-7-most-popular-contenders-for-the-antichrist>.

⁴ Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, & 3 John* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014).

⁵ Ibid.

2. Spiritual discernment helps you know the antichrists are here to distort (1 John 2:18–26).

1 John 2:18–26 states,

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but [they went out] that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us--eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who [try to] deceive you.

John uses a word that no other person uses in the Bible. He coined the word in English *antichrist*, which comes from two Greek words: *anti* and *christos*. *Christos* is referring to Christ, and *anti* means “against” or “instead of.” So these people who are antichrists are in opposition to Christ. They are against Him, against His Gospel and against His church. Their spirit is behind every false doctrine and religious substitute. They could also be cult leaders or false teachers who present themselves to you in-place of Christ. They want to replace Christ in your life. They want to be your Christ.

Let’s break our discussion of antichrists into two questions: Where are they? And what do they say?

Where are they?

They are all over the place; they are everywhere; they are even in the church. They have been in the church for a long time. Since the birth of the church, they have infiltrated and sought to cause disruption and, in many cases, destruction.

- So in the Galatian church, Paul warned of false teachers who had already begun to preach a distorted gospel to the congregation (Galatians 1:9).
- Paul warned the believers in the Philippian church that they were in danger of imitating men who were actually enemies of the cross, walking and ministering for personal pleasures and glory (Philippians 3:17-19).

- Even the Colossian church was warned of internal heresies regarding issues of legalism and ceremonialism that they needed to repudiate (Colossians 2:8 & 16).⁶

In other words, this spirit of antichrist isn't just a 21st century phenomenon. They have been around a long time. John said they were in his church, and we should not be surprised if they pop-up in this church (verse 18).

Many of the cult leaders of our world, along with false philosophies, have their early stages of development in the local church.⁷ What makes their message so dangerous is that it is so close to the truth. Their message is not, "Do not believe anything in the Bible." It is more like this: "Believe everything in the Bible, *plus* all this material as well."

They did not go around during hand shaking time and saying, "Hi, my name is the Antichrist—well, actually, I am **one** of the antichrists. I am here to oppose every advancement for Christ this church tries to make. I am here to lead you astray." They did not have a pitchfork in hand or horns on the head. They were with the regular church members, sang songs with them, and participated in the events of the church with everyone else.

They were with the people of God, but they were not the people of God. The church of God exists on two levels: the local level and the worldwide level. When people trust Christ as their Savior, they become a part of the worldwide church that spans throughout the ages. It is compared to a building (Ephesians 2:21), a bride (Ephesians 5:22-33), and a body (1 Corinthians 12). When someone becomes a part of the worldwide church they should join a local church. This is God's design. John's point in this passage is that someone can be a part of a local church, but not the worldwide church.

We have considered the question, "Where are they?" Now let's look at . . .

What do they say?

These antichrists have a message, and they are working night and day to get it to the ends of the earth. As we are spreading the gospel in Hopkinsville, they are spreading false teaching in

⁶ Davey, "Antichrists in the Assembly."

⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Real: Turning from Hypocrisy to Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1972), 91.

Hopkinsville. As Christian missionaries go out to the nations, so will Satan’s missionaries called “antichrists.”⁸

Their message even contains Jesus. Not the Jesus of the Bible though; they work very hard to redefine Him. They re-imagine him. He is good, they say, but He is not God.⁹ He is wholesome, but not holy. He has a helpful message, just not a heavenly one.

Here is where our spiritual discernment starts to put up red flags for us. It helps us see that the spirit of Antichrist always diminishes the work of Christ.

Notice verse 19. The antichrists start out by attending the church, but they eventually leave the church. I am not talking about them going to a church downtown. I do believe there are some Biblical reasons why a person should stop attending one church and start attending another, but we are not dealing with that here.

We are dealing with people who leave the church and look back and say, “That was never me. I tried it out, but I do not believe those things anymore. That may be good for some people, but not for me.”

I love this truth: God in His grace removes antichrists from the assembly without the church having to remove them.¹⁰ The fact that they left proves they were never believers. They did not stick-it-out to the end with the rest of us. Eventually, they showed their true colors, and it was not blood-washed—only spray-painted. Some antichrists do not know they are antichrists. Their life and message oppose the people of Christ, the gospel of Christ, and the Church of Christ. They may even revolt if they were ever accused of such a thing. Mark Twain said that it is easier to fool people than to convince them they have been fooled.

Verse 19 proves they never belonged, and verses 20–21 prove you do belong. You have been given spiritual discernment. John was not telling these people something they did not know. They knew they belonged.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)

⁸ Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Davey, “Antichrists in the Assembly.”

Verse 20 elaborates that when you embrace Christ, God embraces you: “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.”

In verses 26–27, John explains that he wrote to warn us about those trying to *deceive* us, but reassures them that the enemy is no match for what is embedded deep within us—Christ’s anointing. They are no match for our spiritual discernment. You possess the ability to determine good from evil. You may say, “What about when the evil is *almost* the truth?” Spiritual discernment also helps you determine the good from the *almost* good.

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (1 John 2:26–27)

The Antichrist (singular) comes to deceive. The antichrists (plural) come to distort.

Transition: Notice in verse 27 that we have the term “little children” mentioned again. John uses this phrase to introduce a new topic. I have continued our study into this new topic for a few verses because, although the topic is new, the theme remains the same. We move from the coming of Antichrist to the coming of antichrists, and now to the coming of the genuine Christ.

3. Spiritual discernment helps you know the genuine Christ is coming to deliver (1 John 2:27–29).

1 John 2:27–29 says,

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

These verses are a call for you to stay with Christ. It’s a call for you to live deeply in the person of Christ—the one whom the antichrists are denying. When you do that, church, you will be ready for Christ’s second coming. One man paraphrased this verse like this: “Then we’ll be ready for him when he appears, ready to receive him with open arms, with no cause for red-faced guilt or lame excuses when he arrives.”¹¹

¹¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

False religions (e.g. Judaism, Mormonism, Christian Science, Unification church, and Scientology) claim to worship the same God that we worship. The problem is that they do not believe what Christians historically believe about Jesus. If you deny the Son, you deny the Father.

Just as surely as Jesus came the first time, He is coming a second. He will return bodily and validate every claim He has ever made. He will not only come to validate, but also to celebrate—to celebrate His kingdom. This is the first mention in this epistle of the promised return of Christ. The Book of Revelation deals in detail with rest. We have here merely a mention.¹²

Conclusion

Here is what we believe about the artificial christs and genuine Christ:

- The antichrists will eventually leave the church; the genuine Christ will never leave the church. He proved that on Calvary.
- The antichrists are committed to deceive; the genuine Christ is committed to deliver.
- The antichrists are determined to distort the gospel; the genuine Christ came to be the gospel.
- The antichrists will lead you with them to an eternity in hell; the genuine Christ will take you with Him to an eternity in heaven.
- The antichrists promise you a lot; but the genuine Christ promises you what they cannot—eternal life (verse 25).

As we watch TV, listen to the radio, read a book, or hear “spiritual” teaching, let us exercise our spiritual discernment.

¹² Wiersbe, *Be Real*, 99.

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