

Prayer List

Veda
Wallace
Sheila
Judy
Rose
Ken

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 10:00 a.m.
Assembly 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com

Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com

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This Week's Question:

What prophet had a vision of locusts that run like war horses?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Lamentations - Lamentations 3:52

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Battling the Antichrist

(1 John 2:18–29)

Mike Wilson

The purpose of the First Epistle of John is to give Christians the assurance necessary to sustain their faith (5:13; 1:4). Unfortunately, however, lurking dangers, both within and without, threatened that assurance. The outside threat was the “world,” with all its carnal attractions ready to destroy pleasure seekers (2:15–17).

Now John turns his attention to the threat within, a much subtler and more insidious menace for Christians—false teachers. We may look back on the New Testament period, with a sense of nostalgia, as an age of innocence. There are those who see it as a simpler time filled with nothing but unity, love, and single-mindedness of purpose among God’s people, as if almost nothing could go wrong. The presence of “many false prophets” shatters those illusions (4:1). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, who are willing to stand up in the face of opposition (Eph. 6:10–13). With so many contradictory teachings, competing ideologies, and false doctrines, it is easy to be confused. What is one to do? In the text before us, John outlines a three-fold strategy for battling the “antichrist.”

1. Identify error for what it is (2:18–23). The precise nature of the error facing John’s original readers is somewhat hard to nail down with absolute precision. The issue might be one of the heresies that was developing toward full-blown Gnosticism. Docetists believed that Christ was divine but only “seemed” to be

human (cf. 4:2f). Followers of the heretic Cerinthus taught that the Christ-spirit merely came on Jesus, but that he was not exclusively the Christ (cf. 2:22).

Much to the chagrin of modern dispensationalists, John clearly teaches that there is not just one antichrist. In fact, “many antichrists” had already arisen (2:18; 2 Jn. 7). The apostle does not have in mind just one evil monster at the end of time, but rather a spirit that dwells in many deviant teachers. The spirit of the antichrist exists whenever and wherever the forces of rebellion lift their ugly head “against the LORD and His Anointed (Messiah)” (Ps. 2:1–2, 4, 10–12). So far as John was concerned, this spirit was already alive and well in the first century, and the “last hour” had already been inaugurated. In view of God’s timeline, the “last days” of human history began when Jesus died for our sins, arose from the dead, and the gospel was given to the world. Those who deny Jesus—whether His deity, His humanity, or His rightful place as the Christ—give further evidence of the lateness of the hour.

It is probably wise to be less preoccupied with the precise heresy under consideration, from a historical standpoint, than with the timeless principles involved. Up to this point in the epistle, John has given three tests of one’s relationship with God: 1) an obedience test (2:3); 2) an imitation test (2:6); and a love test (2:9). Here, John gives a fourth, theological test (2:21–22). The “antichrist” is anyone who “denies that Jesus is the Christ.” Don’t let anyone tell you it doesn’t matter what you believe. It is the “truth” that sets men free (Jn. 8:32). There is a temptation to minimize the danger of false doctrines, including those which pertain to the true nature and identity of Jesus, but faithful Christians must draw a clear-cut line in the sand (2:23).

2. Let the Truth remain in you (2:24). John’s original audience had two sources of access to the truth of the gospel. The first is “what you heard from the beginning,” i.e., apostolic preaching. First century churches also had the presence of the Holy Spirit to reveal and confirm the Word, which probably explains John’s reference to the “anointing from the Holy One” (2:20, 27). Just as kings were anointed with oil, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Lk. 4:18; Acts 10:38). In the days before the New Testament was fully published, Christian communities needed access to the word of truth. God met this need by anointing apostles and prophets with the Holy Spirit. This was not a gift that just any Christian

automatically received (1 Cor. 12:28–30). Even though not everyone received this gift, everyone benefited when a prophet was in their midst, which was evidently the case here. For this reason, John says, “You have no need for anyone to teach you” (2:27, 20). John is merely writing to confirm what they already knew, and to give it the seal of an apostle (2:21).

This implies another important point. These Christians did not need a new teaching. They needed to abide in the teaching they already had. They had heard this truth “from the beginning,” and truth does not change. If it was true in “the beginning,” it is true now. John patiently encourages them, Let the truth “remain in you.” Never let the truth go. Hold onto it at all costs. There are some principles that are not for sale at any price.

3. Put your confidence in the Lord (2:25–29). For stability in a confusing world, Christians must have absolute confidence in Jesus, who has sealed His good intentions toward us by promising “eternal life” (2:25). False teachers use people. They exploit them, manipulate them, and lie to them. They would “deceive” us, to be sure (2:26), but not the Lord. Our Savior tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (2:27). The Lord Jesus will never lie to you!

“Abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (2:28). Jesus wants more than your acts of service. He wants a relationship with you. He wants the love of your heart and the devotion of your soul. Many people will recoil in horror when Jesus comes again, but not those who genuinely belong to Him. We know the voice of the Good Shepherd, and He is coming back one day to take us home.

Finally, John says, “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him” (2:29). The question is not whether Jesus is righteous but whether you know it. John had known Jesus personally, and he writes that you might have the same confidence in the Lord that he had. If Jesus is righteous, then he can be trusted. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life ...” Of course, a promise is only as good as the one who makes it. When Jesus promises you a home in heaven, on His terms, you can stake your life on it!