

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eleventh Sunday After Trinity, August 31, 2014**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 348, 260:1-2, 352, 264, 48.

Lessons: Daniel 11:36-39, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, Matthew 24:4-24.

Sermon Text: 1 John 2: 18-23.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You have often heard from this pulpit how unpopular the message, or we should really say, the messages of the Bible are among people today. You have probably experienced the same thing. The truth of God's Word may be met with rejection, with blasphemy, with mockery, with snickering behind your back. Sin is chief among the messages that people don't want to hear about.

Another of many messages from God is Scripture speaking of anyone who is against Christ, of an antichrist. It is not popular today to attack anyone else's religion.

But our text today elaborates on

**antichrists AND THE ANTICHRIST**

- 1. John here warns of many antichrists.**
- 2. His warnings also speak of the coming great Antichrist, "THE Antichrist".**

The term antichrist is one of a number of descriptions that the Scripture uses to teach Christians about Satan's human partners who do his work of trying to destroy people's relationship with their Savior. The term antichrist occurs only in John's Epistles, five times in four verses.

Daniel chapter 7 prophesies of a little horn that will persecute the saints of God. (v. 8, 20-26) Daniel 11 speaks of an evil king who will say unheard-of things against God. (36-39) In Matthew 24:24 Jesus warns against false Christs and false prophets. Revelation is rich in these descriptions. John refers to the false prophet in Revelation 16:13. John sees also the beast of the earth, (13:11-18), the great prostitute in chapter 17, and Babylon in chapter 18. Second Thessalonians 2:3-12 describes the terrible man of sin, also called the man of lawlessness. These descriptions, although very different in imagery, overlap considerably in meaning.

Those passages use prophetic language, that is, they are symbolic, they do not specifically name or identify any particular people or movements, and they are presented to us in deliberately general language. The holy writers are more interested in alerting believers to false teachings than in naming specific false teachers. The readers must apply these truths to the false teachers and antichristians in their own times. The writers use picture language, prophetic language which can have multiple fulfillments.

John's readers, in their original training in the basics of Christianity, had been taught that "antichrist" was coming. There is no definite article ("the") in the Greek of the first verses of our text. Here the King James Version speaks only of "antichrist", not "the antichrist". John's readers had begun to experience the damage that these antichrists would cause, damage which is occurring up to this very day. John wanted his readers to understand what was going on so that they would personally remain strong in faith based on what they had learned from true and faithful teachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He teaches them these things so that they may keep the real Gospel message straight and pure in their ministries. God's truth is the church's power and its great treasure. Falling away from the truth means falling away from God.

God's truth tells us that we are sinners and that God sent his very only-begotten Son to earth to atone for our sins. Scripture makes it clear that we have life after death by believing in that Savior.

John describes what he meant by antichrist, for it was happening already in the first century when John lived. There were many "antichrists". These false teachers had left the fellowship of believers. They were now fallen away from the faith and no longer part of God's family. Whoever denied Jesus as the Christ was a liar and the antichrist. Denying Jesus as the Christ meant denying the Father as well, and it is damning to deny the true God.

In two other places in his three Epistles John also speaks of antichrists and the antichrist. In 1 John 4 we read: "***This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.***" (2-3) In his second Epistle we read "***Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.***" (2 John 1:7)

From these verses we learn that the spirit of antichrist denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and that wicked spirit is already in the world. In addition, John writes that anyone who does not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh is a deceiver and the antichrist and a liar and that there are many of them.

This danger of antichristian teachers is great. Christ is the only thing that connects us with God, and so Satan attacks there to cut us off. The heart of his evil plan is to destroy people's confidence that Jesus is truly and fully God, coequal with his Father in the Holy Trinity, and that God the Son was incarnate fully as a human being, just as the Old Testament Scriptures said the Messiah would be.

***"If they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us,"*** says John. When religious teachers teach things not found in the scriptures, that's a terrible danger sign. When religious teachers can no longer stand the constraints and accountability of working within a Christian fellowship and strike out on their own, that's a terrible danger sign.

John's emphasis in these brief references has been on things happening already in his lifetime. He is speaking of the broad threat of the many antichrists, of teachers who led people out of Christian churches into unchristian cults.

So far we have been speaking of many antichrists. But other portions of Scripture develop the teaching of a great antichrist who is to come who will be found in the visible church. John hinted also at such an enemy, using the definite article "the" and speaking of the antichrist. This would be one who was coming, who was not yet recognizable in the world. This terrible power would not lead people out of the church but would burrow into the church and seek to poison it from within.

Although John speaks mostly of the many antichrists in his letters, most Christians today use the term almost exclusively in the singular.

Antichrist in its narrower sense, as one great Antichrist to come, is only hinted at in John's Epistle. The concept is developed much more fully and in greater detail in Paul's terrifying prediction of the rise of the man of lawlessness, the man of sin, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, our Epistle lesson. There we read more about a great Antichrist, spoken of in our Epistle lesson as "***the Man of Lawlessness***". Christian theologians for centuries have used "the Antichrist" interchangeably with "***the Man of Lawlessness***" to describe that terrible menace to the church. In that narrower sense, "the Antichrist" refers to a single entity, one that emerged only slowly in church history, one that stayed within the visible church, but one that rose to enormous and blasphemous power. History has shown and continues to show that this is the men who have served and will serve in the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church.

What Paul predicted in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 was fulfilled as all of Christianity in Western Europe was slowly hijacked by the bishops of Rome. In the thousand years from A.D. 500 to 1500, the Roman bishop went from being one of many important regional church leaders to claiming that he was the personal representative of Jesus Christ on earth, Christ's vicar on earth. Over the centuries the bishop of Rome, now called the pope, the "holy father", knowingly or unknowingly acted as Satan's anti-Christian agent to undermine the greatest treasures of the church: salvation through Christ alone and knowledge of that salvation through the Holy Scriptures.

Unbelievable abuses and false teachings began to replace the simple Gospel of Christ. People were taught by the Pope, for example:

- that they could never be sure that their sins were forgiven.
- that no pastor of a congregation could ever be married.
- that the church hierarchy, not Scripture, had final authority in the church.
- that there was a holding place after death where even believers would undergo terrible torments to finish paying for their sins called purgatory, after the word “purge”, and that the popes held the power to release people from those torments.
- that certain people whom the pope called saints had led lives so pure on earth that they had piled up a surplus of good deeds, and that through prayer and acts of devotion, sinners could obtain some of this "treasury of merits”.
- that it was necessary for salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff, the pope himself.
- that the popes, when speaking on matters of faith and life, were infallible.
- The Pope condemns the Bible’s teaching of justification by grace through faith in Jesus and teaches salvation by good works.

Pastor M. H. Eibs has written and the LCCF has published a pamphlet called “False Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church” which is available on request at no charge.

These abuses and false teachings were so appalling that some of the early reformers even before the Reformation at the time of Martin Luther, such as John Wycliffe and John Hus, began to whisper that the papacy must be the great Antichrist. Up to the time of Luther, there was no other “Christian church” in Europe than the Roman Catholic Church. And according to that church there was no eternal salvation outside of the church. Three of the six Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century—the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles together with the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord—all name the papacy as the Antichrist. The most forceful statement comes from the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV: “. . . the pope is the real Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his own power.”

Lutherans were joined by other Protestants in whose writings the term Antichrist was used of the papacy. These include Presbyterians of 1580 and 1643, Congregationalists of 1658 and Baptists of 1688.

The false, unscriptural teachings of the Papacy have been repeated even in Time magazine, which is itself a liberal magazine, by summarizing what the current Pope, Francis recently said, including the ideas that atheists might merit heaven and suggesting that if homosexuals are searching for the Lord and have good will he is not about to judge them!

How damaging it is when one has lost the truth of God’s Word and is deceived into believing such false teachings as these! But thanks be to God for reformers like Martin Luther whom God used to restore the truth of God’s Word for us!

And so, in the face of all these threats – including the threat of being drawn into a non- Christian cult and the threat of being misled by false teachers within the church what are we to do? John is reassuring us that God has not left his people helpless. He goes on: ***"You have an anointing from the Holy One"***, that is, from Christ. Every believer has been given spiritual gifts when he or she was baptized – anointed – beginning with the basic gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith: ***“all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.”*** That Spirit-anointing enables us to hear and believe the Word of God, the truth. The objective truths of God's Word are greater than any false teacher, any cult leader, or any denominational tyrant. We already know the truth – we don't need any secret knowledge. We already know the truth well enough to tell when someone is lying about Jesus Christ. We will continue with that comfort and encouragement in our next sermon on First John chapter 2. We must continue to ***"Search the scriptures"*** (John 5:39) to assure and reassure us, our children, our grandchildren and fellow confessors of Christ of the eternal life Jesus promises! Amen.