

Who Is Anti-Christ?

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Date: 12 June 2022

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. My name is Elise and I'm part of the Little Faith Group in North Oakland. Here is a reading from John's first epistle. 1 John 2.15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father, but from the world.

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. Dear children, this is the last hour, and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

[1 : 13] This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

But their going showed that none of them belong to us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and 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.

Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the Antichrist, denying the Father and the Son.

No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.

If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us, eternal life.

[2 : 16] I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you.

But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit, just as it has taught you, remain in him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you for that scripture reading, Elise.

I have something in the back of my throat, unexpectedly, so I have this pink Minnie Mouse water bottle of my daughter's. And the straw's not working. Great. Okay.

We'll see how this goes. But good morning, Christchurch. My name's Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. Oh, thank you. Our lead pastor, Jonathan St. Clair, has been on sabbatical, I don't know how many weeks now, but we're glad that he's away.

[3 : 23] And I just want to just notify you that he's still a Christian. He texted me this morning, and he said, you know, I miss you, man. I'm praying for you. I said, I had to double check, though.

I said, hey, where are you going to church, though? He's still going to church. He's going to our friend James Westbrook's church, Realm Church in Oakland. So in case you were wondering, he's still a Christian. He still worships God on Sundays, all right?

Good news. Good for him. Well, why don't we open up the scriptures together, and will you join me in prayer? Father, we want to come before you, believing with all our hearts that you are the God who wants our best life.

You are the God who is light, and you want us to walk in that light, and to know your love, and to share that with other people. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would accomplish that in us, and that your Holy Spirit would do a work on us as we listen to what you have to say in your precious and holy word.

So would you change us? Would you make us the people that we want to be in Christ? And would you do that to the glory of your name and for the good of this world? In the name of Jesus, we pray. [4 : 33] Amen. So we're continuing our summer series in the letter of 1 John. We're calling this series Life, Light, and Love because 1 John reveals to us that that is precisely who God is.

He is life, light, and love. And not only is that who God is, but that's precisely what he wants for his beloved children. He is the God who was from the beginning. He is the God who is life, eternal life, abundant life in and of himself, and he wants to include us into that eternal life-giving joy of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.

And this life that he wants for us, it's not just any kind of, you know, choose-your-own-adventure kind of life. He isn't any kind of God. He is the God who is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

He is a God who wants us to walk in that light, and so not to stumble in the darkness. And what he's revealed to us here in this letter so far is that the way to walk in this light is to walk in love.

Sacrificially, just like Jesus, who gave his life and his blood to cleanse us of all of our sins and to satisfy God's justice. He wants us to love others as he loves us.

[5 : 41] And this is how we demonstrate that we know God. This is how we demonstrate that we are in possession of the abundant life that he wants for us. It's by living like our Father.

It's by loving like our Father. Now, hopefully everything I've just said sounds good to you. I imagine it's completely unsurprising and uncontroversial, right?

Even for those of us here who may not be Christians, hearing a Christian minister teach from this religious text that God is about life, light, and love, it's probably what you would expect.

Especially this love stuff, right? But as we continue in 1 John today, we'll find that this letter has more to say about what it means to love like God loves.

Because sure, most of us can, most of us are down with, you know, loving people selflessly. Most of us are down with love your neighbor as yourself. But today in 1 John, when the instruction continues on love, it tells us actually what we are not to love.

[6 : 41] What we're not to love. Look at verse 15. Do not love the world or anything in the world. We're cautioned here in 1 John that to really love like God is to actually not love certain things.

And in fact, one might even say that to love the wrong thing is to be anti-Christ. And that's the title of my sermon this morning. It's a question you've probably not thought of, but it's a question I think we all need to be wondering.

The question is, am I anti-Christ? Am I anti-Christ? Now, what we have to understand about the setting of 1 John is that in the early Christian community, following from its Jewish roots, there was a common understanding of the coming of the Messiah as marking the end of time.

They called this the last day or the last days or here in 1 John, the last hour. And while most people, they didn't anticipate that these last days would span, you know, over 2,000 years.

It's been over 2,000 years since Jesus was here. Most people didn't expect that he would come and then he would ascend and promise to come back again. But according to the Scriptures, this time period that we are currently in, even though it's been 2,000 years since the time of Jesus, we are still in what's called the last days.

[7 : 54] We're in this last hour. Like if we understand all of history as a book, from the time Jesus came even until now, this would be considered as the last chapter of history.

And at the end of history, something else that early Christians expected, according to the words of Jesus, was an uptick in deception and false teaching and hate and lawlessness.

When asked by his disciples, Tell us what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? Jesus, he said, And in particular, at the end of time, the prophet Daniel, the apostle Paul, the apostle John, indicate that at the end of history would not just come the return of Christ, but right before that, a counterfeit Christ figure.

A counterfeit Christ figure that 1 John here calls the Antichrist. In Daniel's prophecy and in John's visions in Revelation, he's called the beast. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, he's called the man of lawlessness.

He's this kind of powerful, kingly figure who will dominate and deceive many in the world and claim to be God, loving and exalting himself above the one true God.

[9 : 27] All right? So that's kind of the background here. I'm sorry, I know that was a lot, but you're following me. End of time, we're in the last days, and we're to expect this Antichrist figure. That's

what these people reading 1 John would have been understanding as they're reading this letter. That was their expectation, all right? So now let's read verse 18 again with that background in mind. Dear children, this is the last hour. And as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

But their going showed that none of them belonged to us. So again, the early church had this understanding that they were in the last hour, and they were always to be looking out for this deceptive Antichrist figure.

And what has happened in this church that's receiving this letter is that they had had some false teachers. They had had some people trying to lead people astray who were previously in the church, but had now left.

[10:35] They'd seen some attrition from these people believing different things about Jesus. Now did you catch what 1 John calls these people who left their community in verse 18? As you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many Antichrists have come.

What? More than one Antichrist? Well, yes, even as there will be one final Antichrist, the beast, the man of lawlessness, 1 John indicates to us that actually there's a sense in which in the last days, in the last hour, in our present time period, there are many Antichrists.

Later in verse 22, 1 John says, In the next letter, 2 John verse 7, it says, Many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world, and any such person is the deceiver and the Antichrist.

So what 1 John is saying is that now in the last hour of history, it is more important than ever to watch and consider what we love, because what we love is what we are.

For not only is the Antichrist coming, but the spirit of Antichrist is already here and embodied by anyone who claims to have the truth and yet does not acknowledge who Jesus Christ really is.

[12:08] God became flesh to save the world by his death and resurrection. So what does that mean for us? You know what this means? This means that you can be Antichrist.

This means that I, preaching up here, I can be Antichrist. See, 1 John is written to wake us up. To not be looking just outward for some evil future figure to determine the times and interpret history. 1 John is written for us to consider, how might I actually be Antichrist? Like, in what ways am I not for Christ?

In what ways am I not pro-Christ? It prompts us to ask, what are the things in my life that I might love more than my Father in heaven?

All right, so in case you were wondering, that's my take on Antichrist here in 1 John, all right? And it's really important because, again, what we love is what we become.

[13:10] What we love is what we become. And I want us to hold on to that. We're going to talk about love now. Let's go back to the beginning in verse 15, having this background. Let's go back to verse 15. And I want to ask, what does it mean when it says, do not love the world or anything in the world?

Or in the Greek, do not agape the cosmos. Do not agape the cosmos. I mean, wow, that's pretty comprehensive, right? How can you tell me not to love the world or anything in the world?

How can 1 John say we're not supposed to love anything when God himself, in John 3, 16, the Gospel of John, it says, for God so loved the world. And 1 John just told us a couple weeks ago to love our brothers and sisters, to love our neighbors, to love people in this world.

Well, what we have to understand is, you know, as is common in pretty much every language, in the Bible there can be and are often multiple senses to words like the word world.

And so depending on the sense that's used, there are right ways to love the world and there are wrong ways to love the world. So for example, the Bible talks about the world as God's good creation that we are to care for and that we are to cultivate.

[14:18] Or the world sometimes just refers to all the people of the world whom God loves and whom we are supposed to love. But the Bible also, particularly here in verse 15, also talks about the world in another sense.

It talks about it as this prevalent way of thinking in our broken, fallen world. And this way of thinking is what we might call worldliness. Worldliness, where all that matters is matter.

Where all that matters is the world. And the world, not God, is ultimate. Worldliness is where we put all our hope and trust in the things of this world and not God.

Where we love and pursue and admire and honor everything else above God. Anything else above God. So when 1 John is saying not to love the world or anything in it, it doesn't mean don't love God's creation, don't love the people in God's creation.

God himself loves the world. But it's saying, do not love the world above God in the way of worldliness. And this might be basic to some of us who've maybe been Christians for a long time.

[15:22] Of course, I know I'm not supposed to be worldly. But it's so important to understand this distinction between the world and worldliness. See, because throughout Christian history, on one side of the spectrum, many conservative and fundamentalistic Christians have understood this word world simply as God's creation.

And so what they've done in order to try to be holy is they've sought to separate themselves from the creation, from the culture, from society. And they've often done this in self-righteousness.

Self-righteously disengaging from culture, disengaging from society and politics, looking down on those outside of the church as merely depraved human beings.

Such Christians have often focused solely on what they perceive to be spiritual matters, right? Not caring for the material needs of the orphan and the widow and the poor and the hungry, seeing their day jobs as only necessary evils, their workplaces only as places to proselytize the unfaithful unbeliever, and not as places to put God's redemptive story on display by working with excellence and integrity.

Such Christians fail to acknowledge that every square inch of creation belongs to God, and that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we're supposed to do it all unto the glory of God.

[16:47] Such Christians fail to acknowledge that even those who aren't in the faith are still made in the image of God. And just as Christians can and have committed horrendous evils in this world, people who aren't Christians can do amazing good in the world because of God's common grace at work in the world, restraining evil and preserving good.

Do you remember what happened after Cain killed Abel? Evil Cain killed his brother in the beginning, right? And then he had his descendants.

But guess what? It was evil Cain's descendants who built cities and made music and cultivated farming and created culture, and they made tools. Even if they pursued evil ends and did not call upon the name of the Lord, God still used them to bring much common good to the world.

And so often conservative fundamentalist Christians have failed to see that. And my prayer is that that will not happen here. But now you have the other end of the spectrum. There have been the modernistic or so-called progressive Christians who have had so positive a view of the world, so great an appreciation for the world and Cain's descendants and the good things outside the church, so much belief in the world's inherent goodness and so little attention to the world's fallenness and brokenness, that these progressive Christians have often slid into worldliness, often self-righteously condemning conservative Christians for being irrelevant or backward, focusing solely on material matters.

Yes, they feed the hungry, maybe they protest and they pursue great causes in this world. But progressive Christians have often, when passing out food at the food bank, you know, bread that will either pass through people's bodies or rot and mold, they often never think to share the eternal bread of life, the good news about Jesus, the good news of eternal and abundant life that yes, can be experienced now, but is still yet to be consummated when Jesus returns to make all things new.

[18:59] Like so rosy are many liberal Christians' views of this broken world that they virtually slip into believing that with enough love and hard work and ingenuity, creativity, they can actually save the world themselves merely inspired by the Jesus myth that to them may or may not even be true.

But see, here at Christ Church, contrary to those on the right and the left, the way of the real Jesus, we believe, rejects both of these errors. Faithful followers of Jesus, we bear witness to new creation with our whole lives.

We love the world, we engage culture, we pursue excellence in all we do, but not out of worldliness, but out of a love for God, who himself will make all things new in the end.

And this comes out more clearly in the second part of verse 15. If anyone loves the Father, I mean, sorry, verse 15. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

See, that's the ultimate goal. The ultimate goal of this teaching about love is not spirit versus matter, it's about loving the Father more than loving the world, loving the Creator more than loving the

creation, loving God more than anything else.

[20 : 15] And I know that to some of us, this might seem rather restrictive and even counterintuitive to our understanding of love. This notion of being told what to love and what not to love.

It really, it flies in the face of so much of what we're taught to believe as Americans, especially in the Bay Area. Because here in America, we live by the principle of what this Cal sociologist, Robert Bella calls expressive individualism, where each individual has their own unique internal feelings and intuitions that they must faithfully express to the world.

And no one else can tell us what to do and certainly not what to love. Choosing what to love is our fundamental human right, right? It's like that lawn sign I ran past in my neighborhood this week. I'm sure you've seen them in your neighborhoods. In this household, we believe that black lives matter, that science is real, that no humans are illegal, that women's rights are human rights.

And right there, smack in the middle, bold and bright and pink, that love is love. That love is love. It's just common sense, right? Love is just love and it's always good. So everyone should just be free to love whomever and whatever they want, however they want, and for as long as they want.

[21 : 35] Why are we restricted to loving God the most? Why put restrictions on love? Why put restrictions on a good thing? And is it even love if we are commanded to love?

Shouldn't we just follow our hearts? Well, maybe, but I want to read what the prophet Jeremiah said. The prophet Jeremiah said, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick.

Who can understand it? So what I want to do is I want to question. I want to question whether or not we should all be completely free to just love whatever we want.

I want to remind us, as the author Rebecca McLaughlin reminds her children, whenever they drive by signs like that that say, love is love, she reminds her children of what the scriptures say.

Actually, right here in this letter, 1 John chapter 4, that sure, love can be love, but first and foremost, what's most important to know is that God is love.

[22 : 34] God is love. He is the standard. He is the authority, and his ways are not arbitrary. See, when God tells us what to love and what not to love in 1 John, it's not like God's saying, hey, love the color green, but not the color blue.

He's not saying, love cheese board and not sliver. God wants us to love in a way that comports with the world that he's made, down to the very last detail.

He wants us to love like we were always meant to love, and not according to the lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes, or the pride of life. Look with me at verse 16. For everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life comes not from the Father, but from the world.

The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. See, the reason God wants us to love some things and not other things is because he wants us to love and to live forever.

He wants us to love what lasts forever. And if I'm honest with you, my lust of the flesh, they don't last forever. I used to not like hamburgers. I love hamburgers now.

[23 : 47] And it's good that my lust of the flesh for fried chicken doesn't go on forever. Okay? I eat too much of that. We need to love things that last forever.

All right? God wants us to love and live forever with him. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, none of these last. And thus, nothing that our flesh or that our eyes lust after, no worldly achievement, is worthy of our ultimate love.

According to 1 John, according to all the rest of the scriptures, according to Jesus himself, human beings were always meant to only have one ultimate love. One love that would define who we are and what we were made for.

One love to orient the whole of our lives. In his book, You Are What You Love, author Jamie Smith says, love is like gravity. It's something that pulls on us.

It's like autopilot, orienting us without our even thinking about it. And that's why Jesus never said the greatest commandment is to just obey or to be good or even to be kind and unselfish.

[24 : 54] The greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is to do what humans were created to do in the first place. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus quotes from the great Shema, from the Jewish law, emphasizing exclusive allegiance to Yahweh.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the one Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

You know, in reality, it should be silly to us that we even needed to be commanded to love. Just as it should be silly to us that we needed to be commanded, you know, thou shalt not murder. But ever since the world fell into sin, when humanity went our own way and loved an infinite number of things other than God, God had to give us this basic command to love Him, not because He's some egomaniac, but because in sin our hearts went after a whole lot of other things, only leading to further death and further despair.

Things that would make us simultaneously less human and less like God. That's what happens when people originally made in God's image love other things more than God.

[26 : 11] We become less human and less like God. Adam and Eve thought they were becoming more like God, but they already were. They already were perfectly like God.

And they only dehumanized themselves and made themselves less like God. See, God's not about denying or restricting our loves. He wants to perfect and elevate our loves.

He wants His children to love and not to lust. You know, this word for lust in the Greek, *epithumia*, comes from *epithumia*, *epi-over-thumia*, desire.

It means to over-desire. Why do we lust? Why do we over-desire? It's because our flesh and our eyes are insatiable outside of a loving relationship with God.

And the things that we want to achieve and boast about are innumerable. We've given ourselves the final say in what to love, but the thing is, can we actually handle that responsibility?

[27 : 10] Can we actually handle that responsibility? I'm reading an awesome book right now. It's called *You Are Not Your Own* by Alan Noble. He did his PhD at Baylor, and I think it might be the most important book I've read in years.

And his basic thesis is that modern people like us, to our own detriment, we have bought into the lie that we human beings are fundamentally our own and that we ultimately belong only to ourselves. And thus, we have made ourselves all responsible for the meaning of our own lives. We all now bear the burden of justifying our lives by how we will live and what we will value and what we will love.

But, he writes, the responsibilities, the responsibilities, the responsibilities of self-belonging require God-like powers to sustain, leaving us exhausted, tired, burned out, and finally bored.

We are always becoming a fully realized human and never arriving. Nobody ever arrives because there is no destination outside ourselves to arrive at. All we have are options and shifting opinions and an overwhelming feeling that whatever the standard might be, we aren't measuring up.

[28 : 27] Our work is inadequate. Our house is inadequate. Our tastes are inadequate. Our spouse is inadequate. Our body is inadequate. Our education is inadequate. And so on and so on. So please, can we at least consider that this might be good news?

Can we at least consider the good news of a God who tells us what to love and what not to love? because we, on our own and in our sin, we cannot handle that responsibility.

Like, thanks be to God that He has shown us a way to live and love that actually lasts. That actually lasts by loving Him. By loving Him, the eternal triune God to whom the great African theologian Augustine prayed, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.

Christ Church, what do we love? And will it last? What do we love and will it last? How we answer this question will change everything for us.

It'll change everything for us because the quote Jamie Smith again, you are what you love because you live toward what you want. You are what you love because you live toward what you want.

[29 : 37] Do we love Christ or are we anti-Christ? Do we love Christ or are we anti-Christ? And if you're here this morning and you are unsure, maybe you look at your life and your flesh just has so many lusts, I know mine does, so many over-desires, you just can't kick that addiction to alcohol or porn or whatever it is that you're using to self-medicate your pain and your trauma and your emptiness and your insecurity and your loneliness.

You just can't let go of your worldly ambitions and your pursuit of the pride of life and your work commitments continually supersede and override your commitments to your family and your friends and your church and your health and even your God.

I want you to know that 1 John was not written to condemn you but to give you assurance and hope and direction. Verse 21 says, it is not written because you do not know the truth but because you do know it.

If you are a child of God, if that's truly who you want to be, to be His, to belong to Jesus, yes, there may be many antichrists in this very room but, verse 20, but you, the ones sticking around, continuing to pursue Christ and seeking to love like God loves, even with all of our failures, you are not alone but have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth.

God's word to us even in our struggle to hold on, even in our struggle is to hold on, is to hold on and to hold fast to Him, to hold fast to the good news that won our hearts to Christ in the first place.

[31 : 19] That God Himself took on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to be with us, to identify with us in every wound and trauma and temptation and to emerge sinless yet still to die for our sins, to die for us, to raise us up with Him unto new life, light, and love.

Verse 24, as for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning, the gospel, remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

And this is what He promised us, eternal life. That's what this is about. Eternal life. Friends, this promise is still good for us.

It's still good and available to all of us. This promise of eternal life. That God wants to be with us forever. This is good news.

This promise is still good that He wants to abide and be with us and enjoy us as we enjoy Him forever. So as it says in verse 27, as the gracious anointing we receive from Him remains and abides in us, God's Word is calling us to let us remain and abide in Him.

[32 : 37] He is divine. He will bear much fruit and we will so prove to be His disciples. This is what He wants for us. Do we want it for ourselves?

Eternal life, light, and love with God, in Christ, and with the Spirit. Will you pray with me? Amen. Amen.