

Loved and Loving: John's Epistles
Walking in the Light: Rejecting Antichrists

Lesson #6 for August 8, 2009

Scriptures: John 15:4-10; Acts 2:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4; Hebrews 1:1,2; 1 John 2:18-29; 4:1-6; Joel 2:15; 2:1.

1. This lesson focuses on “the last hour” and some of the ways in which Satan will seek to deceive church members in this critical time in history. Are we living in the “last hour”? How do we test the spirits?
2. Jesus, Paul, and John spoke about the deceptions that will be present in the final days of this earth's history. (Matthew 24:4,5,11,23,24; Acts 20:29,30; 1 John 2:18-29; 4:1-6)
3. Should we be surprised to discover that Satan will mount all-out attacks against God's people as individuals and God's church as an organization as he faces his final showdown?
4. Have there been any false christs or false prophets in our day? We have been assured that antichrists, false prophets, and false messiahs will come. How should we prepare ourselves and respond when that happens? The Bible is always the Christian's standard for testing any doctrine to see if it is true or false doctrine. There may be areas where we have questions and differences in interpretation. There may also be areas where there seem to be contradictions. Are those apparent inconsistencies sufficient reasons for us to doubt the truthfulness of God's Word. (I certainly hope not!) Satan is extremely clever at preparing counterfeits. He will do everything possible to make it look like his counterfeits are genuine. Why do you think there are so many churches with so many minor variations in teaching in our world today? Can you think of some teachings, doctrines, or movements in our world today that would qualify as counterfeits or even antichrists? How can we make certain that none of those things lead us astray?
5. Counterfeit experts have shown repeatedly that the best way to identify a counterfeit is to be exceedingly familiar with the true item. To identify antichrists, false prophets, and false messiahs, Christians must be very familiar with the true Christ or true Messiah.
6. What do you think John had in mind when he talked about antichrists in his day? Scholars have sometimes identified the “sea beast” of Revelation 13 or even the “man of rebellion” in 2 Thessalonians 2 as the antichrist that John was speaking about. It would most likely be correct to identify any image, substitute, or parody of Christ as an antichrist. Those substitutes will always end up opposing some important aspect of the truth. 2 Thessalonians 2:4 suggests that one antichrist will sit down in the temple of God claiming to be God. 1 John 2:18 talks about the antichrist in singular number. But it also speaks about antichrists (plural). We may be able to identify numerous individuals or groups that have set themselves up as substitutes for true Christ or Christianity. But, who is the ultimate antichrist? Without a doubt, that designation belongs to Satan himself.
7. John specifically pointed out that some denied that Christ came as a true human being and he called them antichrists. It appears that some of those people were very successful in drawing members away from the true church.
8. Paul spoke of the deceivers who will attack the flock of God as wolves. (Acts 20:29-31) Wolves are creatures of the night who carefully and silently stalk their prey and, when possible, unexpectedly attack the weakest members of the group. What does that tell us about Satan's methods? Look at the people in our day that are openly promoting the ideas of atheism! What examples can you think of that are more subtle? What about SDAs who attend church regularly but do not consider doctrines like the ideas of creation really that important? Could one be an evolutionist and a Seventh-day Adventist at the same time?
9. Read 1 John 2:18-27 and 1 John 4:1-6. These parallel passages talk about false doctrines or teachings being spread among the members of the church. Can you think about, identify, or name any false doctrines that are being spread in the Adventist church today? What always happens to those who take up those spurious causes? (1 John 2:19)

10. As we have mentioned already, in John's day there were two common errors with respect to the divinity of Christ. Both were based on the fundamental teaching that the spirit and the body are opposed to each other. The docetists taught that Jesus was never really fully human, but He just appeared to be human and put on a charade for His entire life. A slight variation of that idea was taught by Cerinthus. These people believed that Jesus was a very good human being and the "Messiah" or "Christ" "came upon Him" and took control of Him at His baptism, worked through Him until just before He was crucified, and then departed and went back to heaven.
11. Those were two of the most prominent ways in which people were denying the true humanity/divinity of Christ in John's day.
12. In 1 John 2:18-27 and 4:1-6 we can identify several key methods that God encourages us to use to avoid falling into such traps. 1) We must know the truth. People who know the truth well can identify others who know the truth. Such people will be guided by the Holy Spirit. By contrast, 2) Others were saying that "Jesus is not the Messiah." John said such people were not from God because they were not listening to the truth and did not have the Holy Spirit. Those people, although professing to be Christians, eventually left, proving that they had never been true Christians. John concluded by saying that those who reject the Son were rejecting the Father also.
13. Those verses give us very strong evidence that doctrine and teaching really do matter. Many Christians in our day seem to think that all we really need to do is get together and all love one another. That, of course, would be great if it were genuine. But those people would have us believe that "doctrines" or "teachings" do not really matter very much. In order to avoid being deceived, we must have a close, personal, permanent tie with the Source of truth. Just loving each other does not take the place of knowing and obeying God.
14. How are we to understand the expression "the last hour" or "the last days"? (Joel 1:15; 2:1; Acts 2:15-17; Hebrews 1:1,2; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18) Throughout history (almost!), God has spoken about a final time coming in which it will be critical for God's people to stay close to Him. Considering the full context, it seems that John was writing of the entire time period after the first coming of Christ until the second coming of Christ. Apparently, all of the apostles believed that they were living in "the last days." Don't we believe that we are living in the last days? Look at John 4:23 and 16:2. Jesus recognized that the Devil will look for any opportunity to deceive and mislead God's people.
15. When the Bible writers referred to "the last days" or even "the last hour," they were not talking about a set time in history. In Greek there are two different words for "time": *chronos* from which we get our word *chronology*, and *kairos* which means an appropriate time, the right season for something to happen. In these passages the idea is that when the right time comes, Christ will appear. They were writing about the conditions that will lead up to the second coming. Christ had already been to this earth and defeated Satan. God has said that He will have a group of people at the end of time that will be faithful to Him. He knows that Satan will do everything possible to prevent the formation of a group of people who are so close to Christ that they cannot be deceived and who will, in turn, stand up for the truth and speak the truth to the whole world at a time when their very lives are being threatened. Conditions will be at their very worst. Spirituality and morality will seem to have been lost in the gutter. Satan will unleash a war against the saints. (Revelation 12:17)
16. Under those circumstances, even Peter—writing 30 years before John—wrote, "The end of all things is at hand." We must "be serious and watchful." (1 Peter 4:7)
17. What is an "antichrist"? Is it the same as a "false messiah" or "false prophet"? The *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* defines the antichrist in light of all this information as follows: "It is an evil system opposed to everything Christ represents and goes back to the origin of sin, to the beginning of the great controversy." Ellen G. White said, "The determination of antichrist to carry out the rebellion he began in heaven will continue to work in the children of disobedience."—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, p. 230.
18. Read 1 John 2:20,21,27. What is this "anointing" that John wrote about? Some other Scripture passages may be helpful. 1 Samuel 16:13; John 14:17; 15:26; 16:7,12. From these passages it

seems clear that the Bible writers were writing about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What do we mean when we talk about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Is the Holy Spirit some kind of influence that can be measured out in quantity? Can “a few drops fall on me”? Once again, Ellen White has written definitively on the subject:

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.--*Manuscript 66*, 1899. (From a talk to the students at the Avondale School, April 15, 1899) {*Ev 616.5*}

19. So, what does the Holy Spirit have to do with an/the antichrist? Read Ephesians 4:30; 1:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21,22; Revelation 7:1-3; 14:1-5. In these passages the Holy Spirit is described as placing a “mark” of ownership on God’s true people. That mark is based on a person receiving the truth and cherishing it. The Holy Spirit is the agency that inspired the prophets and the apostles to write the words of Scripture. Those words if accepted and studied and “digested” will turn us into true children of God. We say that they are “sealed.” How does the Holy Spirit do that? What is the “seal” that the Holy Spirit applies?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming. (*MS 173*, 1902) {*4BC 1161.6*}

20. The Holy Spirit “seals” God’s people by giving us the truth contained in Scripture. The Bible must always be our final authority for truth. There may be areas which we do not fully understand. There may be areas where we do not even like what we read because it opposes our natural, selfish tendencies. But that does not in any way detract from its being the truth.
21. In this light would it be correct to say that anyone who opposes the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is an antichrist? What happened at the infamous 1888 Session of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists? *1 Selected Messages*, p. 234,235 says:

“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). In this scripture, the Holy Spirit through the apostle is speaking especially of the moral law. The law reveals sin to us, and causes us to feel our need of Christ and to flee unto Him for pardon and peace by exercising repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, and to accept this truth, lay at the foundation of a large share of the opposition manifested at Minneapolis against the Lord’s message through Brethren [E. J.] Waggoner and [A. T.] Jones. By exciting that opposition Satan succeeded [235] in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficiency which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world, as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world.

Could Satan actually use people who are striving to do their very best to be Christians? Ellen White wrote that the General Conference committee of her day actually turned back the latter rain. Could that happen again? Have we—personally or as groups in our day—turned back or delayed or prevented the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Could such a thing happen in our day? How would we respond if we saw it happening? Why hasn’t the latter rain come at any time since 1888? Have other groups within our church prevented it from coming?

22. Our only safety is in abiding in Christ. (John 5:38; 6:56; 8:31; 15:4-10; 1 John 2:14,28; 2 John 9) The

Greek word used is often translated *abide* which means *to remain, to live in, or to dwell in*. That is a very important concept in dealing with apostasy and deception. It appears 20 times in 1 John and twice in 2 John.

23. While God would love to save every one of His children, He realizes that would be impossible. However, He does promise eternal life to those who develop an abiding, trusting, personal relationship with Him. That is the Christian's hope. (1 Corinthians 15:1-19) That involves the crucial and essential choice we need to make to live a life of loving service instead of a life of selfishness. Infants are born "thinking" only of their own needs. They are naturally very selfish. But we need to grow up and grow out of our natural selfishness to be more like Jesus. Where do we as individuals stand on this point? Have we done anything in the last 24 hours to demonstrate loving service to those around us? Christ pleads with us not to be ashamed when He comes. (1 John 2:28)
24. There appear to be two main safeguards that John wrote about which can prevent us from being led astray. One is to abide in Christ. (1 John 2:24) The second is to be anointed by the Holy Spirit through regular, daily "feeding" from God's Word. (1 John 2:27)
25. Paul praised the Bereans who listened to him preach and then went home and "checked out" everything in the Old Testament scrolls for themselves! Paul challenged them not to just believe it because he had said it was true. (Compare Galatians 1:8,9) But, what if you belong to the church that has "the truth"? Is it possible that that very church or some group in that church could at some time in the future lead us in a wrong direction? Dr. Maxwell used to talk about people who believed they were "born on the bus" (the Adventist Church). If something goes wrong, many of those people will complain and even withhold their tithe. However, they will not do anything to help the bus if it gets a "flat tire"! They believe that the bus is headed in the direction of the kingdom of God, and they think they will just "ride along"! That is not how people are going to be saved!
26. What will become of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when a national or even an international Sunday law is proclaimed? Could we continue to exist, worshiping on the Sabbath under those circumstances?
27. Seventh-day Adventists adhere to the basic Protestant tenet that any new teaching must be consistent with all previous true teachings of Christ. The Bible alone is to be our standard. Some other Christian groups such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teach that their church organization takes precedence over Scripture. They believe they even have the authority to change Scripture as they see fit. That is a recipe for disaster. We must never allow any human being or any human organization to stand between us and God's Word.
28. In this lesson we have seen some challenging concepts. Are we ready for the antichrist in our day? Was the church ready for it in 1888? If the latter rain was "turned back" in 1888, what is keeping it from "falling" in our day? Could we be among those people who are preventing the latter rain from falling in our day? Do we know Jesus Christ so well that even the Devil—impersonating Jesus—could not deceive us? If the shaking time should come, would we be shaken out? How can we be certain that we are "sealed" by the Holy Spirit?

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