

The Spirit of Antichrist

Denying God

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I do not know if you have noticed, but my last nine sermons—including this one—(except for the ones that I have given on the holy days) have followed a similar line of thought. This "series" really has not been a series; but *it has* been a series, in a way. It started before the Feast last year. That was the sermon, you may remember, that I gave on *Politics and Christ's Return*. That was the beginning of this 'line of thought' that I am having.

That sermon was basically about our approach to God's doctrine and way of life. Do we look at it liberally? Do we look at it conservatively? Or, which is the conclusion that I reached, we should look at it biblically—or godly. We are neither liberal nor conservative. We may have more conservative tendencies than liberal ones; but, in the end, when it all comes down we are supposed to be godly. Not looking at the Bible, or the way of life that God has revealed to us, in a political way. Our way is apolitical. We are supposed to be above the fray. We are supposed to look at everything through the magnifying glass of the Bible, and not through any so-called political approach.

After that, I gave the sermon *Is God's Way Simple?*—which looked at another aspect of our approach to God's Word and God's way of life. Do we look at it from a simple approach—that God's way is supposed to be simple? Or, do we look for complexity? And my conclusion on that one is that, at the beginning, God's way seems very simple; but, as we go deeper and deeper into it, it becomes more and more complex and would satisfy any intellect. And we have to go from simple to complex—or from shallow to deep—so that our understanding deepens.

Then, to end the year 2000, I gave the sermon on *Poor Choices*—which chronicled the poor choices that men have made, and God's command that we make the right choice—life, as He says in Deuteronomy 30. We want to choose His way—and no more poor choices for us.

In January, I gave the sermon *Willingness To Believe*, which is a very large part of our approach to God's way. We have to be willing to believe God first—even blindly, if we must.

Because God says something, we have to be willing to believe it. Then, in time, we will understand what it is that God actually meant for us—by having us to do certain things. The classic example is Mr. Armstrong, who was willing to believe that we should keep the holy days; and he kept them for seven years before he finally figured out that they had something to do with God's Master Plan. So, we have to do the same thing. If we see in the Bible that God wants us to do something, we had better do it—even though we do not understand exactly why it is that He wants us to do it. We have to have that meek, childlike approach to God's Word.

Then, in February, I took the opposite approach and said that we have to worry that we are not deceived by being too gullible, or by believing too easily. Not necessary God's Word, but we have to make sure that we do not just believe everything. We have to have standards. We have

to have very precise judgment. So *Preventing Deception* still had to do with our approach to the truth.

I spoke about *Pitfalls of Scholarship* in March, because many people want to approach God's Word from a very scholarly point of view; and there are pitfalls in doing that. In many cases, scholarship ends up being just plain "worldliness;" because you are not really factoring God into the picture. Scholars, in this world particularly, come at the Bible with a humanistic approach, in general, because they have not been called. They simply do not have all the tools. So we have to make sure that we approach it in a godly way, and not in a scholarly way.

In April the sermon that I gave was *The Bible Doesn't Have All the Answers* which is the simplistic approach (opposite to the scholarly approach) that the Bible contains everything that any man ever needed for anything. I mentioned that it is not a recipe manual. Some people look in Ezekiel and see "Ezekiel bread," and they think that bread is somehow better than anything else. So the Bible is not a science textbook. It is not a history textbook—although there is history and science, in it.

The Bible is God's revelation to mankind. And its main idea, if you want to just put it down to its basics, is how does a man become saved? Or, how do men become God? Right there in Genesis 1: 26, God gives the Specific Purpose Statement: "*Let Us make man in Our image.*" And, from that point on, the creation process begins.

So, we cannot look to the Bible for "What do you do if you stub your toe?" necessarily. But you can look for answers in how to be like Christ. That is what the Bible is there for. As Mr. Armstrong put it, "It's the instruction manual for mankind." But it is not for everything that mankind might get into, but specifically his relationship with God. That is what it is instructing us about.

Then, in May, I spoke about *Spotting False Teachers*. We also have to consider, in our approach to the truth, that there are those out there that are not preaching the truth. However, they can influence us if we are not careful. So we need to know what the clues are, let us say, that will help us spot those who are not preaching the truth.

And now there is this sermon, which I have called *The Spirit of Antichrist*. As I was ending my last sermon, I was trying to explain the understanding of what "antichrist" is. And I did not quite get to it. I feel that I need to go into that because, after you start talking about false teachers, you have to explain something about what "antichrist" is. It just flows naturally.

So, though all these sermons have been somewhat disjointed (because I have not necessarily told you that I have been on one specific theme), they all do have a common theme—in just describing various attitudes toward what God has revealed to us. Now we have come to see how false teachers work. We will begin with that, so that we get a running start into the spirit of antichrist. Then we will go into antichrist itself and how it effects even us—the called children of God.

We will begin in Jeremiah 23. From verses 11-15, God is describing the situation in Judah. It is basically Israel and Judah. He mentions Jerusalem in there; but He also mentions Israel, in verse 13. So, He is describing the situation not only as it was in Jeremiah's time but, in a way,

historically looking at how prophets and priests had worked throughout Israel's history—and it is not a very nice picture. In those verses, God shows that they have been deceiving the people all along. He is very indignant, and He says that their punishment is coming. And it is not going to be stopped, because they deserve it—for being false teachers and bringing things that are profane and godless into His land, among His people. That is the first thing that He opens up with.

Jeremiah 23:11a "For both prophet and priest are profane."

That means "godless." It means "without God." In the New Testament, there is a word that means "far from the temple." So, you get this idea that if you are close to the temple, then you may have something to do with God. But if you are *far from the temple*, it gives the picture that you do not want anything to do with it. That is the idea here. Even though it was their job to bring the people God's way of life, what the priest and the prophet actually did was teach the people to leave God out of things.

They were profane. Profane is the opposite of *godly*—or *holy*, let us say. And what they were doing was teaching the people exactly the opposite of what God wanted them to preach, and had given them to preach. So, He said that He was going to bring disaster upon them because, to His eyes, they were just like Sodom and Gomorrah. He mentions wormwood in here. He mentions the year of their punishment. It was going to be a very bitter and terrible end for these people. That is, very terrible punishment.

Jeremiah 23:16a Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you."

That is pretty good advice, do not you think? After He has just described to us what it is that they have been doing all this time, it is pretty good advice—not to listen to them.

Jeremiah 23:16b "They make you worthless. They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD."

I thought that was very interesting that He said to them, "They make you worthless." Does that not make you feel wonderful? That is, that the prophets and the priests, whose job it is to bring the truth, end up making people worthless. This has, basically, two different meanings; and they are not necessarily "mutually exclusive." Maybe they could both happen at the same time.

The first one is that they deceive us, or (to make it general) they *deceive the people*. That is, they deceive people to [cause them to] believe worthless things. Things that do not matter, things that do not have a hill of beans to do with salvation or that are really important to life. And, in the end, these worthless things that they try to teach us to pay attention to lead *idolatry*.

I do not know if you are aware, but in the Old Testament especially the word that is often translated as *idol* is literally vain thing, or a vanity. And it means something that is worthless, something that is useless, something that you would not give a cent for—because it does not matter. How much is an idol worth? What is its real value to us, in the long run? Nothing! It does not get us anywhere.

Remember in the Old Testament (I think it is in Isaiah) where he talks about hammering down this piece of wood and gilding it over. It does not talk. It does not hear. It does not do anything. It just sits there. It is worthless! It is an idol. It is vain. And that is, basically, the way that false teachers guide us. They give us worthless things to think about; and it ends up making us (or the people, to make it general again) worship something other than God—something that is absolutely useless.

The other way that we can approach this ("they make you worthless") is that they *belittle the people*. They make the people themselves feel like nothing. When you have read the history of the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, who was important? It was the priesthood that was "important," and they made the people feel like nothing. They kept them down. That is why, even before that time, it was called "The Dark Ages," because the only ones who had any real learning at the time were the churchmen. The people were, basically, living in very poor and unhealthy and uneducated conditions. They made the people little. They made them worthless—in their eyes. It is the attitude of the churchmen, or the prophets, or the priests that they do not mean anything. They are only "a tithe check," let us say. All they are there for is to support them and their lusts, their desires, their ambition. So the people mean very little. They have no value. They are only stones to be trod on—to get them where they need to go.

It also says here that these false prophets speak a vision of their own heart. What this means is that the ideas that they teach are *self-generated*. They come from inside them. They do not come from God's Word, though they may make one think that they do, because people like this tend to handle the Scripture very "slickly." They will find something in the Bible that seems to support what they are saying, and then they play it for all its worth. But the idea behind it all comes from their own minds. And far too many fall for their pitch, because they can be very slick. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether the ideas that they are teaching are from the Bible or from their own minds. So it is just something to look for.

Jeremiah 23:17 "They continually say to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You shall have peace"; and to everyone who walks according to the dictates [imagination] of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"

They say, "You shall have peace." The message of these preachers (these priests and prophets) is a message of benign good. They do not want to hurt you. They do not want to bring anything on you that might be troublesome. So, like in the Protestant churches, they preach: "Love, love, love." "You are saved—guaranteed. Nothing can stop your salvation." "You are already born again, and you've got it made." That is the sort of thing that we are talking about here. Their messages are of benign good. That is, an "I'm okay, you're okay" type of message. It makes the people feel good, but it does not produce any spiritual fruit.

Feelings do not replace *righteousness*. God wants to see us produce fruit, show growth, repent of our sins. He wants us to show that we are doing His way of life—living it! And we are putting on the mind of Christ. But such that preach soft things, smooth things, are not aiming one towards the goals God is aiming for. God's way, if you want to look at it this way, is a constant "search and destroy mission" to root out evil in ourselves.

It is not something where we feel "good" all the time. If we feel good about our character, if we

feel good about our behavior and conduct, we probably have the wrong attitude. This may not sit well with some, because they want to *feel good*; but it is a basic fact of Christianity is that it is not easy to be a Christian. If it were easy to be a Christian, everyone would be one! But it is not. Christianity, in many ways, comes down to a life of suffering and sacrifice—if you do it right.

God wants us to be in health and to prosper, and to be happy and joyful, and all of that. But because of the world that we live in, and because of the world that we have come out of, it is hard! (Because we love to do all of those other things.) It is so much "fun" to be worldly. But it is a matter of getting self-control over ourselves and doing what God says—and that is hard. All of us have human nature that rebels against doing right—because, for so long, we have done exactly what human nature dictates to us. So, to overcome it, it takes a great deal of sacrifice and a great deal of suffering.

I am sorry. I wish it was not this way. But this is the way it works for all of us. If it did not work this way, Jesus Christ would not have suffered on that day that He died. I think we have gotten too far from the very plain fact that it says throughout the New Testament that we have to bear Christ's cross *daily*; and that is no easy thing. We fight principalities and powers *daily*. So, if you think Christianity should be easy and soft, well, I am sorry, it is not. To do it right, it really takes killing the self. It says that in Colossians. You have to mortify your body. That is tough.

It says in Romans 12:1 that you have to become *a living sacrifice* to do it right; and that is tough. And those who preach that we "have it made" and that the Christian life is "cushy" are not correct. It says right here that God says that those who say that you shall have peace are actually the false prophets. Those who say, "no evil shall come upon you" are the ones that we have to be afraid of. God's way is one of constant *repentance* and constant *work*. That is the sort of thing that makes God happy. That pleases Him—because it shows Him that we are trying in every way, with every fiber of our being, to be like His Son.

It even says, in the book of Acts, that God promises that those who will live godly in this life will have tribulation, trials, testing—bad things. So, we have to make sure that our approach to God's way of life is not looking for "the good life," because that is surely going to trip us up down the road. Then we will have itching ears for those people who preach to us the good things, the kind things, the smooth things, the peaceable things—when it may be that what we need is the persuasion and the exhortation to repent, and to continually grow and mature. I want you to see this very specifically, because God continues on this theme.

Jeremiah 23:21 "I have not sent these prophets [He says], yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

He is telling us that these people are not from Him at all. They have taken it upon themselves to do this. The words that they speak, remember, come from their own minds. God did not put them there. Now listen to what He says in verse 22:

Jeremiah 23:22 "But if they had stood in My counsel [meaning, "If they had listened to what I said."], and had caused My people to hear My words [meaning, done exactly what God wants a prophet or a priest to do], then [Listen to the effect.] they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.

What did God say, in that little scripture there, that He wanted His preachers to do? Turn His people from evil. He wanted them to preach repentance. What did John the Baptist do when he came? He preached repentance. That gives you an idea that that ministry goes right into the New Testament. Jesus preached repentance too. Paul preached repentance too. John preached repentance too.

Interestingly, Paul called it the "message of reconciliation." But do you know what that is? That is repentance! Who needs to be reconciled? We do! And we are reconciled by the blood of Christ. But we are in no way in God's league yet, as far as character goes. And so the preaching that we do tries to bring us closer and closer and closer to what God is—so that there will be a meeting of the minds. We are truly only reconciled to God when we are *thinking like Him* and *living like Him*.

So that "message of reconciliation" is just a New Testament continuation of the message of repentance that goes all through the Old Testament. How do we become more like Him? We repent, and overcome, and grow, and mature. And it all starts with us saying, "I'm wrong. I won't do this again. God give me the strength."—and then you go.

It is kind of encouraging to preachers who want to continue this message that God says should be preached, that it says here that, IF we continue to preach it, THEN fruit is going to be produced. What did He say? He said, "If you had stood in My counsel and caused My people to hear My words, it would have borne fruit. They would have turned from their evil ways." God guarantees it. When the right message is preached, it will produce the right fruit. It is a law. It has to happen that way.

But these preachers—these priests and prophets—failed. They were false, because they preached peace. They preached no evil. They preached a message of their own heart. They made the people worthless. They brought in profane things, rather than holiness and godly things.

Jeremiah 23:25-27 "I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long will this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed they are prophets of deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

Some false teachers even base their false teaching upon dreams they have had, as if they have had some sort of prophetic vision. And God says, "This isn't from Me." Dreams are far, far down the list as proofs of God's involvement in a person's ministry. One of the reasons why they are not very good "proofs" is that usually only one person has the dream, and dreams are very hard to verify. So, if someone has a dream and bases a ministry on it—or bases teaching on it—all we have is that person's word that he actually had the dream in the first place. Or that the dream is as he said it was. Or that the dream means what he says it means. Do you see how many ways a dream could be manipulated? That is why it is very far down the list as a proof of God's involvement in anything.

Now, God did use dreams for certain people; but men like Daniel are without reproach. Men like Joseph, who acted on their dreams, did not go out and preach that they had had a dream. Just

generally, usually a dream from God tells somebody to do something for that particular time. In the case of Joseph, it was to let him know first of all that the child that Mary had was of the Holy Spirit. And then he had another dream later on that told him to go to Egypt; and that was to save his life, Mary's life, and of course Jesus' life. Of course, it was also to fulfill the prophecy, "from Egypt have I called My Son."

But, if we base an entire teaching on a dream, it is very probable that it is not from God—because God has already revealed everything that we need to know, in the Book. So we have to be very wary of those who base things on dreams. Jude mentions this in Jude 8, about those who dream; and he does not have very nice things to say about false teachers who use their dreams as part of their ministry. So do not fall for it!

What God says, here in verse 27, is that those who use dreams in this manner lead people into idolatry. The dream itself becomes an idol, or what the man uses as the goal that the dream supposedly leads him toward become the idol, or the man himself becomes the idol. Or he leads you, finally, to a false god that is not the true God. It is very plain there that God says that, if a ministry is based on a dream, the people will eventually forget God—just like the people in Israel forgot God for Baal. It just works that way. You cannot base teaching upon a dream. It will not work. The ministry has to be based on God's Word.

Now, if the dream fits with God's Word, then that is fine. But it had better be proven conclusively. And it had better not be the only thing that is holding up what one is preaching. There needs to be more proofs than that. Listen to God's approach to this. It is very interesting.

Jeremiah 23:28-29 "The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?" says the LORD. "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

Do you see what God is saying there? I think it is really interesting. He says, "If somebody has a dream, fine. Let him tell the dream. And then let My preachers preach the Word. Let's see which ones wins." He said, "My Word is like a hammer that crushes rocks." He said, "My Word is like a fire that burns chaff." And He said, "When it all comes down to it, which one is going to win? Which one is going to be the one who lives for eternity? Which one is going to be standing, and the other one destroyed?"

Obviously, God's Word is true. It is truth. And He is willing to let His Word stand against anything. To me it reminds me of the illustration of Elijah standing against the prophets of Baal. There was no contest! He let the prophets of Baal do all of their screaming, and antics, and cutting themselves, and everything else. And all Elijah had to do was pray a very simple ten or fifteen second prayer, and what did God do? He sent the fire, and consumed the offering. And then Elijah whipped out his sword and killed all of them, because who was stronger? Who should stand, and who should fall?

In a way, that is what God is saying here. God is up to a challenge; because He knows that, in the end, His way will prevail. We just have to make sure that we are strong enough to be able to tell the difference, and to believe the proper one. So we need not be too concerned about these false teachers as long as we can recognize them. God says,"Let them speak." But God's

way will win out, in the end. What we should do (even though God lets them speak) is to *get away*. We do not want to hear them. Let them prattle. Let them go on. There is nothing, really, that we can do about them. But we do not have to stand there and listen to them.

Many of us—most of us—when we found that the teachings in Worldwide Church of God were false, we left. Did any of us try to stop them from preaching? No. We were doing exactly what it says to do here. Let them preach. God's way will win in the end. We just have to *remain faithful* to it.

We are going to look at antichrists now. First I want to read all the scriptures that have the word "antichrist" in them. They are here in I John and II John. There are only three places. And, because they are only in I John and II John, only John uses the terms (one is singular, and one is plural).

I John 2:18-23 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.

I John 4:1-3 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

And now, in II John 7, this is a kind of a very quick summation of what John has said already.

II John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

There are two nuances in this word "antichrist." If we just look at it, *antichristos* (which is the Greek word)—we would think that it means *against Christ*. That is what "anti" means, so, anti-Christ; and that is one definition. (1) "One who stands *against* Christ—in opposition." The second meaning is very similar. (2) "One who stands *in place of* Christ." Do you get the difference? Not just one who opposes Christ, but one who makes himself out *to be* Christ—who *replaces* Christ. And that would definitely fit the end-time Antichrist. Well, the other one does too, because he places himself *in opposition to* Christ.

So these are not mutually exclusive, but they are two nuances of the term. One can be opposed to Christ, and not claim to be Christ. But, on the other hand, the Antichrist at the end will claim to be God; and so he puts himself in the place of Christ. It generally refers to one who opposes

what Jesus Christ represents or teaches.

The word, in itself, suggests opposition. And, in many cases, the way that it works out is that it is covert. It is kind of under—not something blatant, where someone comes out and actually says, "I am against Christ." People who are antichrist often pretend to be friendly to Christians, or Christianity; but in reality they are antichrist.

This description here in I John 2 shows that these people had been in the church. They were friendly to Christianity; and John says that *they have gone out from among us*. That is, these people who are antichrists. So, there is a note of caution there—that we could have antichrists among us. And we probably have! Maybe not now? I do not know. But all of these things usually come out in the wash later on, when the fruits are shown.

One of the fruits that John shows here is that such people tend to leave us, because they are "not of us." Birds of a feather tend to flock together, you know. If they become too uncomfortable, they usually leave. However, some of the more devious stay and cause trouble, but many go out from among us.

There is something else here that we have to understand. It comes from the way that John writes this (about antichrist). Listen to what Adam Clarke says about this particular section. This is how far it goes.

Any person, thing, doctrine, system of religion, polity, etc. which is opposed to Christ, and to the spirit and spread of His gospel, is antichrist.

Do you see how general and all-encompassing that is? I'll go on [with the quote]:

Every man who opposes the spirit of the Gospel, and every teacher and writer who endeavors to lower the Gospel standard to the spirit and taste of the world, is a genuine antichrist, no matter where or among whom he is found. The heresies which sprang up in the days of John were the antichrist of that time. . . We may bring this matter much lower [meaning, down to our level] every enemy of Christ, everyone who opposes his reign in the world, in others, or in himself, is an antichrist; and consequently every wicked man is an antichrist. But the name has been generally applied to whatever person or thing systematically opposes Christ and his religion.

Do you see how close this can come? John uses the term in *three different ways*. The first one is *the Antichrist*—the person who will come at the end of the age. Revelation calls him "the Beast." That is the first way. Remember that John says, in I John 2: 18, "the Antichrist is coming." But then he goes on and says that there are *many antichrists*. So, the second way that he uses it is in false "Christs" and false teachers in general. That is, those who teach things against what Christ taught—against the doctrine of Christ. And the third one is the all-encompassing one. That is, that anyone who is in opposition to Christ, His doctrine, and His way of life is *antichrist*—is opposed to Him.

Do you see how that got wider, and wider, and wider? Antichrist is both *a name* and it is *a description*. And it can apply to anyone who falls into opposition to God and Christ. We cannot leave the Father out here, because John himself brings in the Father. "If you deny the Son, you deny the Father also."

Also (as John said, and as I have already mentioned), antichrists can even enter the church. They can even have high offices in the church. They can be very persuasive *in the church*, and they can work within it. So, we have to be very vigilant to come to understand what is going on—to understand them, to spot them, and to flee from them.

Now, let us look at these verses a little bit more closely.

I John 2:18 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.

This is both an admonition and a prophecy—both a warning and a prediction. It applies at all times. That is, this warning that there are those who have been among us. There are antichrists "out there" at any time. Here we are at the end of the age, and this coming of the Antichrist is even closer to us than it was when John wrote this. So we had better heed this warning even more than those people necessarily had to listen to it.

The fact that so many are teaching contrary to the true doctrines is one of the proofs that we are, indeed, in *the end time*. Remember what Christ said, in Matthew 24. The first thing that He mentions is that there would be deceivers and false "Christs." Thus we know that, as these things intensify, we are getting closer and closer to the end. So, this makes it all the more essential that we be able to recognize the spirit of antichrist, when we come across it.

I John 2:19 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.

It is unfortunate, but many times we do not recognize them until they leave—or right at the end, when they are beginning to leave. And then it becomes very plain, very clear, that they were not true and chosen sons of God. We can begin to see a track record of antichrist-type things that they have done. Often, with these cases, we tend to have wonderful 20/20 hindsight. We do not see these things as they progress, but looking back we see the progression of them from the past to the present.

What John says here is that they showed themselves to be "different." If they had been like us, if they had really been true Christian, if they had not been antichrists but "Christ-like"—then they would have stayed among us. That is, among those of us who hopefully are trying our best to be Christ-like. As I mentioned before, birds of a feather flock together. People become uncomfortable when others around them are not doing like they are doing. So, people with these antichrist tendencies tend to leave.

I Corinthians 11:18-19 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

In a kind of prophecy here, Paul says that divisions, and splits, and differences, and disunity, and that sort of thing, continue in the church. One of the main reasons for it is to show who is the true and who is the false. We have to do our best to *remain true* all the time and not allow

these divisions, and factions, schisms, splits, or whatever, to get us down or to make us fall from our level of being Christ-like. And eventually (after these divisions, and splits, and factions occur), they end up clarifying matters, and should bring peace to the church—because you get the bad apples out. It may take some time before all that happens, but the end result is good. It allows the truly called and chosen to, then, have an environment of peace again.

I John 2:22-23 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.

In a sense, John here defines antichrist as one who denies the Father and the Son. In English, "deny" is a fairly common word. It means to declare something to be untrue, to disclaim connection with, (In a sense, this is what Peter did. He denied Christ. He disclaimed any connection with Christ.), to disavow, to say no, or to refuse. Some synonyms that we might use are contradict, disbelieve, disclaim, prohibit, recant, refuse, refute, and reject. They are all different nuances of the word *deny*.

The Greek word, *arneomai*, means simply "to say no." When somebody asks you a question, to say, "No." Or, it means to refuse (much like our word "deny"). As a matter of fact, the last two definitions that I got out of Webster's Dictionary for "to deny"—that is, to say no and to refuse—are the same definitions that Vine's and some of the other references gave me for this Greek word, *arneomai*. It means "to say no" or "to refuse."

Saying "no" to God, or refusing Him, can happen in any number of ways. We can refuse the urging of God's Holy Spirit to do something—to follow God's will. We can reject a teaching. It can go all the way, of course, to rejecting God totally. The end, the result, of any kind of denial like this is always the same. It might take a while to get to it, but what our denial does—that is, its eventual end—is to change the nature of God in our minds.

Let us take this from the abstract, and then go down to the practical. In the abstract, God reveals to us—through His Word, primarily; but also in the creation, and in His works—what He is. He gives us the truth, and the truth reveals Him. It reveals His character. It reveals the way He behaves. It reveals as much about Him as we need to know. And IF we reject any part of that, THEN what we imagine as "God" in our mind is not going to be what the true God is like. Do you understand?

Let me repeat that: God reveals the truth of what He is—in God's Word, in the creation, and in His works that we can see. And if we reject Him in any piece of it, then what we imagine "God" to be will not be exactly as He revealed. This leads to two conclusions (at least, to me). The first one is that God knows we are incapable of understanding Him fully. So, He cuts us some slack in this regard. None of us, in the end, in this human form, would be able to "paint" (for lack of a better word) what God is exactly like. We are finite. We are human. Therefore we cannot truly understand the fullness of God right now. So, God gives us a few points in that regard—because we simply are incapable of it. Paul says something very similar to this.

I Corinthians 13:9-12 For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child [which is how we

think now—compared to God]; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. [And when we become like God, then we will be able to have a greater understanding of the way things really are.] For now I see in a mirror, dimly, but then [when that time comes] face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

So God does give us a bit of leeway here, because He knows that we cannot understand His nature fully. Thus, He winks at our dim understanding; but He looks to see that we are trying our best to understand Him more fully, as we progress.

The second conclusion that I have reached here is, maybe, a bombshell. We all possess *elements of antichrist*. Remember what this is coming from—from that abstract thing, that God reveals to us everything about Himself. IF we reject any part of it, THEN we do not come to see the true God. The first conclusion was that God cuts us some slack on this, because as humans we really cannot understand the fullness of God. But that does not deny the fact, does not negate the fact, that we have rejected certain parts of the revelation.

We have done this as a race [of people]. We have done this individually. Is any one of us pure? Is any one of us godly, in the full sense of the term? No. We have been called out of the world that is anti-god, antichrist. We lived in that world for many years. And God, indeed, has redeemed us from it. He has forgiven us. He has wiped the slate clean. But how many of those behaviors, and attitudes, and beliefs did we drag into the church with us? That is, those anti-god and antichrist types of beliefs. How many of them are we still purging from our minds and hearts?

So, yes, we all contain *elements of antichrist*—because we are all struggling to come out of this world. They are still there; but we have God's Spirit to give us the strength, and the understanding, and the will to begin to put those things out of our lives—and go the right way. Notice what John began this entire section with. We did not read it, but he begins this section:

I John 2:15-16 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

John, in a way, jumps from this topic—that the world is not what God made but what Satan made, meaning this system that we live in. Not the physical creation, but the cultural and spiritual world out there—which is something that Satan's mind produced, influencing mankind. John jumps from this, into speaking about antichrists and the fact that antichrist comes so close as to be in us in many ways—because we still have elements of the world in us. And everything that is "of the world" is against God.

This goes right back to what I was talking about there in Jeremiah 23. Our entire Christian life should be devoted to rooting out antichrist in us, so that we can become Christs. It is very simple. What happens when you get rid of all that is antichrist? What are you? Christs. Not "the Christ" obviously, but you will have His character. Is that not what God is producing? He is trying to produce sons and daughters just like His Firstborn.

Thus, all of Christian maturity is designed to reduce and throw out all of antichrist that remains in us; so that, once we have reached the end of our life, we are as much like Christ as

any human being can be. That is the goal. What does it say?:

Matthew 6:23 Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these [other] things shall be added to you.

Our whole Christian life is devoted to becoming as righteous as Christ is. And then no antichrist feelings, thoughts, tendencies, beliefs, behaviors will be in us. Of course, that is never going to happen physically. That is why we have the hope of the resurrection. We are going to be spending our entire lives trying to do something that is impossible to do humanly. We have the help of God's Holy Spirit; but we are always going to be dragged down by our flesh, by the pullings of human nature, and by Satan's influence.

That is why the reward of those who are in the first resurrection is going to be so much greater. There is so much for them to overcome—more than others will have, in later times. That is why the first resurrection is called *the better resurrection*. Yes, indeed, it is full of suffering. It is full of sacrifice. It is full of yearning, and striving, and denying the self. But it also has the greater reward. It is a glorious reward—where you get a crown of life; and you also get to sit next to God and Christ for the rest of eternity, and work with them closely. Of all people who have ever lived, those who are in the first resurrection will be most like the Christ—because they have had to go the same route that He did.

Those in the later resurrection will have it far easier—without the disturbances and the influences of Satan, without a corrupt world already there to influence, and in an environment of Christian living. But those of us now, who have to struggle every day to put on Christ, have that reward ahead of us—that goal of being in the first resurrection. And so our entire lives are devoted to being as much like Christ as we can be. Thus, throwing antichrist out and putting Christ in. That is, putting on "the new man." How many different ways is it said in the New Testament? This is our life.

In the next sermon, maybe I will go into some of the other scriptures that I have here. I think we should go into Galatians 1:6. Mr. Armstrong went there often—about those who preach another gospel. This has to do with antichrist too. So, I will pick up right here the next time that I speak.