

## Anti Christ - A lesser Jesus

1 John 4: 7 - 21

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With Ben



John starts his letter with a depth of emotion and affection that is expressed in the Greek 'Dear friends' or 'dearly beloved friends'. In a very difficult and turbulent world the early Christians valued each other highly and so should we. Together they hung onto Jesus Christ.

For decades John's ministry was mainly around Asia minor, what is now western Turkey. John is a big contributor to the writing of the Bible: The Gospel of John, his three letters and Revelation. He wrote the gospel 'That you might believe'. His letters are to Christian friends. The fellowship is coming under pressure and he was aware of their vulnerability. They are quite naïve, like little children in the big wide world. Let's be clear. The Christian faith is not the faith of the gullible. There are gullible people who will believe absolutely anything. Falsehood is proffered and it's disturbing to see how foolish people can be. You may be quite astute, cynical and analytical but you have been overwhelmed by the power of God's Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God that have brought you to saving faith. You have a reasonable, settled faith of mature understanding and God-given wisdom. John can see that these people lack discernment. They are easily taken in by things that are not true. That is a very dangerous place to find yourself. Don't let go of the truth. This fellowship of friends was starting to fracture under political pressures and social disturbances. These Christians are being exposed to something called Docetism which taught that Jesus Christ only appeared to have a physical body and did not suffer or die in reality, but only seemed to. It was much like an iceberg that breaks off from the ice-shelf and the edges begin to erode in warmer waters so the centre becomes increasingly exposed. The people are not being smart. John anchors down his text to the physical person of Jesus. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched" (1Jn1:1) God came in the flesh. People had heard about and seen the Messiah, now they wanted to touch him. The promise was that God would send a man. (Gen 3:15) They stopped believing that Jesus was fully man and fully God. It was suppressed in the council of Nicaea but it remains in the Quran. (ch. 4 157-158) Concerning the crucifixion, Jesus appeared to be crucified but God snatched him away so even as a person the redemption was not lived out in his body because he wasn't actually crucified. It only seemed like he was. The Bible was not considered to be factually true. It is like the Greek myths that teach morals. The Jesus stories seem to be true. Things appear to be something but they are not. Jesus seemed to be God but in reality he really wasn't. The Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses have the same view. They have a version of Jesus that is just not Jesus in all of his glory and all of his fullness. John's argument is, "Don't let go of Jesus as he actually is". He really did come and give his life for you and really rose from the grave to ascend into Heaven as a man and will return as Lord. Don't let go of these great truths!

These people needed to wise up, be discerning and be smart. There is something here about testing every spirit, not every person, but every spirit. You may notice that suddenly the mood changes and it's hard to put your finger on it. Like when the atmosphere in a room changes. These people were saying the right things but there was a sense of the Spirit being absent. Where is the love, the fellowship? There is something missing. A person can say the right thing but if he doesn't believe it, the Spirit is not in him. Sometimes it is hard to work out if this is God or not. We are cautious about making snap judgements about people (Do not judge) or condemning people out of hand but we have to use our nous to figure out the difference between right and wrong, true or false. We need to be able to trust our senses and follow it up to get to the bottom of things because there often is a problem. The Spirit God has given you is alerting you to the presence of a problem. Christians must use their judgement and discernment. We have to be wise about these things.

In verse 3 we are actually given a name for what was happening. This other spirit, not the Spirit of God, is the spirit of the anti-Christ. You see how serious this matter is. You'd spot the

devil if he came along in bright red with horns and a tail. The Bible says he comes as an angel of light; very compelling, attractive and interestingly engaging. He's very impressive but not true! We need to be wise and discerning. The personification of this spirit and his appearance is mentioned elsewhere in scripture. His spirit is at work abroad in the world so we shouldn't be surprised if we encounter, find and rub shoulders with the spirit of anti-Christ in the times in which we live. We should expect it, so be smart. Why does it seem that we all should be quaking in our boots. This spirit is already at work for thousands of years. It will destroy your faith, your fellowship and it will destroy the church. It won't take any prisoners. It doesn't matter who gets hurt or what relationships get disrupted or who gets offended. It is merciless and there are no rules. The devil will not play fair with you or give you advanced warning. He will jump out at you from the dark when you least expect it. That is what John's friends are up against. The same spirit that was at work then is at work in the world now. We need to be awake! Be watchful. Be careful. You could lose the real Jesus. You could lose sight of him as he actually is. You could end up with a second-rate, low-grade, diluted, filtered Jesus: a Jesus without the blood and without the guts, brains, wit and the power. Do you want to worship such a gilded lily? Jesus is sufficient as he is. You don't have to build him up or exaggerate him. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is nothing greater one can say. He is the real deal. Jesus Christ is the Saviour. It is so exciting just thinking about it!!!

The spirit of anti-Christ is at work giving us a saccharin, politicised Jesus. Who wants a pet-Jesus you can control, that you can master or be an expert on? I want a Jesus who is an expert on me. I don't want to be his doctor. I want to be his patient. I need the real Jesus and I believe we all do in every church around the world. The spirit of anti-Christ will stealthily, quietly snatch him away. He will put a little Instagram filter over the real Jesus and present something less than he is. Don't let that happen to you, to us.

Christians tend to be few in number and we are up against a very complex society. We can feel overwhelmed by the scale of technology. We feel like a tiny spec of sand amongst the seven billion people in the world. In lots of ways that is what we are. The cosmos is vast and we know so little about it. But here we are. We believe in Jesus and we hold fast to the truth. The world en masse is all mixed up with their beliefs and opinions about what is true or false. The spirit of anti-Christ is clearly at work in the Muslim denial of his death and resurrection and Judaism saying Jesus went wide of the mark and ended up on the outside. Jehovah Witnesses say he is an angel. It just goes on and on. Most people just believe he is a myth and you can't trust the Bible. Surely the spirit of anti-Christ will erode us and erode us down so small we will just melt like an iceberg. And there is no hope. But the Bible says, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (4:4) If by some remote possibility the personification of the anti-Christ happened to be in Mold Market on Wednesday and I happened to be there on Wednesday and I happened to bump into the anti-Christ (the absolute epitome of this spirit) if I met that person, who is greater, me with the Holy Spirit in me or him? Shall we be afraid? "He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world." Do not be afraid. Be bold and very courageous. He is a straw man. You light a match and he goes up in smoke. Luther wrote, "His end is writ". He's going down in flames. He has nothing. Jesus is Lord of all. If he is Lord of your life, you are safe. Hear that, you have been spared. You are saved! This is really good news.

There are so many references in John's writings to the book of Genesis. "And the word became flesh" That is what John's friends were converted to. The eternal God came amongst us in the flesh and perished on that cross. He carried our burdens and sins. God in the flesh took upon himself our punishment. That is what we first believed. Jesus gave us physical emblems of his physical self. It is real. We eat and drink them. Jesus is real. If someone gives you a £5 note and says here's the 50 quid I owe you, don't accept it. Don't accept anything other than the real thing. The word becomes flesh... Our fellowship is real. We are really in Christ. If it says you are saved, then you truly are.