

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 10. Overcoming the Spirit of the Antichrist

by Zac Poonen

The spirit of the Antichrist is a gradual build-up of the world situation that paves the way for the emergence of the Antichrist, characterized by a casual attitude towards sin, self-exaltation, and lying, and can only be driven out by a radical attitude against sin and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Psalm 58:3, Matthew 5 - 7, Matthew 16:3, John 8:44, 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, Hebrews 1:9, 1 John 2:18, Revelation 13:16-17

Topics: "Confronting Sin", "Spirit of the Antichrist"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the urgency of recognizing the spirit of the Antichrist that has infiltrated Christendom, warning that we are in the final moments before the Antichrist's emergence. He explains that this spirit manifests through casual attitudes towards sin, self-exaltation, and deception, which have become prevalent in many churches today. Poonen urges believers to identify and confront these antichrists within their assemblies, as they were driven out in the early church through strong preaching. He highlights the need for a radical stance against sin and a commitment to truth, as only then can the spirit of the Antichrist be expelled from the church. The sermon calls for a return to the purity and power of the early apostles to combat the current spiritual decline.

Transcript

We are living in the days immediately preceding the emergence of the Antichrist on the world scene. But before he becomes manifest as Satan's chief representative on earth, there will be a gradual build-up of the world situation to pave the way for him - somewhat like the slope that leads to the summit of the mountain. The building up of this slope had commenced even in the first century - as John tells us in 1 John 2:18 - "It is the last hour; and just as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen". The Holy Spirit states there that it was already 11 p.m. at the time when that was written - around 100 AD.

We are in the closing seconds of the age now. Things have come to the stage where the summit has almost been reached. We are to live as those who have understanding of the times in which we live (Matthew 16:3).

The kingdom of the Antichrist will be political, economic and religious. We want to consider just the religious aspect of it. The devil has accomplished his purposes far more through false religions than through atheistic governments; and also far more through counterfeit Christianity than through false religions. This is why John speaks about the antichrists as having sat in the Christian churches of the first century. They were however driven out through the strong preaching of the apostles. "They went out from our midst", he says (1 John 2:19).

This spirit of the antichrist is now found in abundance in Christendom today. We need to identify it clearly for what it is, for only then can we drive it out of our own flesh and then out of our churches.

The characteristics of the Antichrist are described briefly in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12:

He is called the man of sin (verse 3).

He is one who exalts himself, wanting to be like God (verse 4).

He is one who lies and deceives (verses 9, 10).

These give us an indication as to what we can expect to find in the antichrists who sit in Christian assemblies today, as they did in the days of John.

Sin

The Antichrist is called the man of sin. His spirit will be manifested in Christendom by a casual attitude towards sin. Preaching against sin will become unpopular in this last generation before Christ returns. There may be plenty of preaching on social equality, on caring for the poor and the illiterate, on providing relief for flood victims, etc., - all of which are good. But there will be hardly any emphasis on sins such as the love of money and material things, sexually sinful thoughts, unforgiving attitudes, outbursts of anger, seeking the honour of men, backbiting, gossiping, etc., (the things that Jesus mentioned in Matthew 5-7). 'The mystery of iniquity' (2 Thessalonians 2:7) will be seen as a false grace that assures people that they are eternally secure just because they once 'accepted Christ', despite the fact that they continue to live in sin. Such preaching tickles the ears and therefore many believers will readily listen to it (2 Timothy 4:3, 4).

In Revelation 13, where the reign of the Antichrist is described, we are told that he gives his followers the option of following him either publicly or secretly. They can receive his mark on their forehead (if they desire to serve him publicly) or on the palm of their right hand (if they desire to retain their reputation as believers in a Christian assembly, and yet want the privileges that can be theirs through receiving the mark of 'the beast') (Revelation 13:16, 17). The followers of Jesus, who are described in the next verse, however have no such option. Their mark must be on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

In the reign of the Antichrist, it will not be possible to buy even essential foodstuffs without 'the mark of the beast'. We have not reached that summit yet, but we are fairly close to it. It is difficult to get employment and admission in many educational institutions in India today, without defiling your right hand with a bribe (one mark of the beast). Factory workers who do not contribute towards the 'Ayudha Puja' festival, each year, are punished by being given difficult tasks in some factories. Many so-called believers compromise in such situations, and yet come to the meetings on Sundays to worship the Lord as 'spiritual' believers. How is this possible? Because no one else in the assembly knows of the unrighteousness and sin that they have practised during the week. The mark of the beast is invisible on their right palm. They may even justify their actions by saying that one has to give in a little if one wants to survive. These are the ones who

feel that bowing down to Satan is justifiable, if it is done in secret, in such a way that one does not lose one's testimony! Today, there are even elders of New-Testament-pattern assemblies who have received the mark of the beast on their right hands in secret. Thus the spirit of the Antichrist rules in such assemblies. Here lies the reason for so much strife and quarrelling and death in many churches.

Only those who have a radical attitude against sin in every form, and who seek to hate sin as Jesus hated it (Hebrews 1:9), can have the power to expose and drive out sin from the assemblies of believers.

Self-Exaltation

Lucifer became Satan by wanting to exalt himself to become like God, so that he could receive the worship of his fellow angels. The desire for worship is found everywhere today - in political circles, business circles and religious circles as well. In false religions, there are so-called god-men who are actually worshipped too.

In Christendom too, we find men who desire to exalt themselves over others by titles such as 'Reverend Father', 'Reverend Doctor', 'Pastor' - just like the Jewish 'Rabbis', whom Jesus condemned. At the root of all such titles lies the same Satanic desire for the worship of others. This is the same spirit that the Antichrist will have who will "exalt himselfdisplaying himself as God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

This desire for the worship of others is also manifested in more subtle ways such as in the sending out of reports of one's work replete with statistics and photographs (usually with plenty of photographs of the leader preaching or praying, etc.).

The desire to exalt oneself over one's fellow believers can also be seen in scheming to be an elder in an assembly, wanting to travel the world as a well known preacher, giving advice to others on various matters (even when they do not ask for advice!), criticising and passing judgment on the work of others as 'self-appointed censors' (James 3:1 - AMP), preaching beautifully arranged sermons for the honour of men, trying to prove oneself as a better preacher than another, imitating the gifts and ministries of others, justifying oneself when one has fallen in sin (Luke 16:15), and in other ways in which one seeks to get a name for himself.

We need to see clearly that all these desires and many more ugly ones lie dormant in our flesh, needing to be severely judged, if we are to be free from them. Only then can we have the authority and power to drive out this spirit of the Antichrist from the churches.

Lying

The Antichrist will deceive the world through "lying signs and wonders and the deception of wickedness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10).

Satan is the father of all lies (John 8:44). The child of God who tells a lie through his tongue is actually offering his tongue as a womb for Satan to conceive a lie. Lying is the one sin that all of us are experts at. We "go astray from birth, telling lies" (Psalm 58:3). There are various forms of lying such as telling half-truths, presenting only one side of the picture (when we want to justify ourselves), exaggerating the reports about our work or in the fantastic relating of incidents (such as is found in many Christian biographies these days, which simple believers often swallow without any discernment), feigning pain and sickness to get pity and sympathy for oneself, pretending to be generous or inwardly pure (when one is not), or relating incidents connected with prayer, fasting or casting out demons in order to give an

impression that one is an expert in these matters. There are hundreds of possibilities of lying.

If you are defeated by sin but are honest about it and are mourning over the matter, there is great hope for you. But if you claim to have victory over sin or give others that impression through your preaching, and yet are defeated by it inwardly or privately, then be assured that the words of Jesus apply to you, "You hypocrites, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:33) - even if you claim to be a Spirit baptized believer.

Lying cannot be rooted out of our lives, unless we take a radical attitude against it every time we detect it in our lives. There are many who talk the language of holiness who have not taken a radical attitude against lying in their lives. The spirit of the Antichrist still has power over them, for they seek to justify themselves before men, but do not fear God who will bring every secret thing to judgment one day. Our assemblies must be places where liars of every sort must be ruthlessly exposed through the preaching of the word. It was thus that the antichrists were driven out in John's day and only thus will the antichrists be driven out in our day as well.

Deception

We saw that the Antichrist will deceive people through lying signs and wonders. Supernatural miracles have a great capacity to deceive people. In India, we have seen many instances of heathen religious leaders who have built up a following for themselves through doing miracles by Satanic power.

Supernatural miracles and healings however, are also a part of the equipment that God has given to His church, to fulfil its task on earth. Jesus, Peter and Paul did miracles of such magnitude, such as are not even heard of today. This was because of their faith. The accounts in the 'Acts of the Apostles' are a standing rebuke to the smallness of our own faith today. A church without the gifts of the Spirit is like a man, who though alive, is yet blind, dumb, deaf and paralysed, according to 1 Corinthians 12 (where the gifts are compared to the eyes, ear, hand, etc.). We do not want to be like those unbelieving believers who say that the age of miracles has passed. That age has certainly passed for them, because of their unbelief! - but not for those who believe.

However, this does not mean that everyone who does miracles in the name of Jesus can be followed blindly. There are many who do such miracles, who will finally be rejected and cast out by the Lord Himself! (Matthew 7:22, 23). Why then does God allow such people to do miracles in Jesus' name? The answer is given us clearly in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. God allows it in order to test us to see whether we will be led astray by signs and wonders, or whether we will follow the plain commands of Scripture. It is important therefore to make sure that your spiritual leader is not one who will himself be cast out by the Lord in the final day. (Read Revelation 13:13, 14 carefully at this point to see how the false prophet - who looks like a lamb (Revelation 13:11), a disciple of Jesus - deceives people through signs and wonders!).

How then shall we keep ourselves from being deceived? The answer lies in checking the Christian miracle worker by the three characteristics of the Antichrist mentioned above. Ask yourself the following questions and you will get the answer:

Is his life and ministry leading people to be free from sin's power, or only to the forgiveness of sins? Does he emphasise purity of heart and life?

Is he a humble, self-effacing man, like Jesus and the apostles were? Or is he interested in projecting himself, making you dependent on him, his advice and his prophecies, so that you cannot be connected to Christ as your Head? Does he have the spirit of a servant or of a boss who gives orders others around him?

Have you found an honesty and a sincerity in his life - an uprightness and straightforwardness - particularly in money matters? (Beware of those who are always interested in your tithes and offerings).

Jesus, Peter and Paul would pass the test, but not many preachers and so-called "healers" today.

Through the spirit of the Antichrist, Satan has polluted Christendom. May God raise up many in our land with the power of the apostles to drive out this spirit from the churches of India.

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