



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 14.1 – The Doctrine of the Antichrist

The Meaning of the Term “Antichrist”

The Greek word “Christ” is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah”. Both of these words refer to someone who is anointed by God for a special office, such as priest, prophet, or king. God gave His Old Testament prophets many prophecies of a coming Messiah or Christ who would fulfill all the functions of prophet, priest, and king that were necessary for the salvation of mankind. Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of all these prophecies. Jesus is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ, God’s designated Savior of the world.

Jesus’ apostle John is the only one among the prophets and apostles who uses the term “antichrist” for those persons or that person opposing Christ. In John’s first letter we read: **“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”** (1 John 2:18). The Christ has many false teachers who oppose Him, and all of them are antichrists, teachers who are not for Christ but against Him. But there is one person who can be called the Antichrist, the one who sets himself up as a great power in opposition to Christ. Because the Greek word *anti* (ἀντί) also means “instead of” or “in place of”, the Antichrist is also described as someone who sets himself up as a replacement for Christ, someone who acts and behaves as though he were Christ.

In John’s own time there were teachers who denied that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah. Of these teachers John wrote: **“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”** (1 John 2:22-23). Along this same line John wrote: **“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”** (1 John 4:2-3). John repeated this warning in his second letter, writing: **“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”** (2 John 7).

Notice that John told his readers at that time: **“You have heard that the Antichrist is coming”** (1 John 2:18). What John was saying about the Antichrist was nothing new. They had already been told about him, but it is only John who uses the term “Antichrist” to refer to him.

The person or phenomenon that John calls the Antichrist was given the name **“the man of sin”** and **“the son of perdition”** by the apostle Paul. But from Paul’s description of the man of sin as opposing Christ and setting himself up as a replacement for Christ it is clear that Paul is describing the same Antichrist that John was speaking of. Here are Paul’s words: **“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God”** (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).

The Christians in Thessalonica were confused. Some people were telling them that the Lord's second coming had already taken place. Paul therefore assures them that the day of the Lord had not yet come. In fact, he said that something else would have to happen before that second coming. The man of sin, the son of perdition, that is, the Antichrist, would have to come first. The coming of the Antichrist would be preceded by a falling away from the truth. Notice that this man of sin would oppose Christ and exalt himself as equal to Christ by acting as though he himself were God. Surely Paul is describing the Antichrist.

Paul continues his warning in this way: **"Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?"** (2 Thessalonians 2:5) Paul had been in Thessalonica for only a very short time on his second mission journey, as recorded in Acts 17:1-10. Yet in that short time Paul had already informed the Thessalonians about the coming Antichrist. Apparently this was a regular feature of his preaching in his mission congregations. But it is only in his second letter to the Thessalonians that we have Paul's teaching concerning the Antichrist in writing.

Paul told the Thessalonians that there was something that was restraining the appearance of the Antichrist at that time. He wrote: **"And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness"** (2 Thessalonians 2:6-12).

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the term "Christ"?
2. Who is the Christ?
3. What is the meaning of the term "Antichrist"?
4. Name the teaching about Christ that John calls antichrist.
5. What is the difference between antichrists and the Antichrist?
6. How does the apostle Paul describe the Antichrist?
7. How could the Thessalonians be sure that the day of the Lord had not yet come?
8. What are the two main features of the Antichrist, according to Paul?