

# THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST IN TODAY'S CHRISTIANITY

BY JOHN PESTER

There is an unusual fascination in Christianity concerning the Antichrist, particularly his identity. Throughout church history various Christian teachers have engaged in such speculation, heralding this or that despot or dictator as possibly being the Antichrist, and many genuine believers, who have been distracted by these speculations, avidly follow world events to discern some hint of the end times with its attendant manifestation of Antichrist. In this state of distraction, however, many Christians fail to see that the spirit of antichrist, as defined by the apostle John in his first Epistle, is operative and active in today's Christianity. This has been true since the time of the apostle John, and it is true today.

In the minds of most Christians, the deeds and actions of the Antichrist are seen most clearly in the book of Revelation, but the man of lawlessness (2 Thes. 2:3), who arises at the end of the age is never called Antichrist by the apostle John in the final book of the Bible. Rather, John associates him with the term *beast* (11:7; 13:1-4, 12, 14-15, 17-18; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:3, 7-8, 11-13, 16-17; 19:19-20; 20:4, 10). John uses the actual term *antichrist* only in his first and second Epistles, four times in the first and one time in the second (1 John 2:18 (twice), 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The term *antichrist* does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. The subject of the second Epistle of John involves a prohibition against participation in heresy, and as such, it is understandable that such a term would be used in this context. However, the subject of the first Epistle of John is the fellowship of the divine life,<sup>1</sup> and the connection between the believers' participation in the fellowship of the divine life and John's warnings concerning the spirit of antichrist is not as obvious.

In order to see the connection, it is important to understand that John is not presenting merely doctrinal points, even though he is responding to actual heresies that were negatively influencing the hearts and minds of the believers, notably the heresies of the Gnostics and Docetists, who denied that Christ had come in the flesh. John, instead, responded to these heresies by revealing the mysteries of the divine economy as they are experienced by the believers. John's unveiling of the experiential fellowship of the divine life (1:1—2:11), the experiential teaching of the divine anointing (vv. 12-27), and the experiential application of the virtues that issue from the divine birth (v. 28—5:21) is a more powerful proof that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh than any mere apologetic response.

In the course of his response, John speaks of the spirit of antichrist, which involves not only a general denial of the humanity of Christ but more precisely a denial that God in Christ in His divinity became a genuine man as the Word of life so that He could be seen bodily, so that He could be testified corporately in redeemed and regenerated humanity, and so that He could be reported faithfully for the continuation of the impartation of His divine life. The realization that God became a man as the Word of

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life to impart Himself as life into redeemed and regenerated humanity has been almost completely lost in the teaching of the church and in the experience of believers. Without an experiential realization of this truth, there has been a deepening embrace of the spirit of antichrist in Christianity. In this embrace, the elements that were characterized and confirmed in the testimony that the Word of life became a man in the person of Jesus Christ—the testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit—are missing almost entirely in the church’s continuing testimony of what others see and hear about Christ. And without such a testimony, the pervasive influence of the spirit of antichrist in the religious world of today’s Christianity will only grow.

### The Spirit of Antichrist in 1 John

John begins his first Epistle by speaking of “that which was from the beginning,” referring to the eternal preexistent fellowship of the divine life in the Father and the Son, a fellowship that “was manifested” so that it could be seen with eyes and handled with hands (1:1-2). The implicit referent to the God who was manifested is Jesus Christ, as confirmed by John’s later word concerning the spirit of antichrist, which denies that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (4:2-3; cf. 2 John 7), but the actual referent in the text is not *Jesus Christ* but rather *the Word of life* (1 John 1:1). John’s reference to the Word of life joins the truth of God’s coming in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ with the purpose of His coming—making the fellowship of the divine life available to humanity: “God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him” (4:9; cf. John 10:10; 1:4). The implicit association of the Word of life with the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh at the beginning of 1 John is made explicit at the end of the Epistle: “*The Son of God* has come and has given us an understanding that we might know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in *His Son Jesus Christ*. This is the true God and *eternal life*” (5:20, emphasis added).

It is important to realize that John’s understanding of confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh extends beyond the mere acknowledgement of a fact. It also involves the nature, purpose, and experience of this manifestation, that is, that as the Word of life, the eternal God became a man in the flesh so that humanity could receive and participate in the divine life that was joined to Jesus Christ’s genuine humanity and mediated through His perfect human living and death on the cross. Jesus Christ, as the Word of life, became flesh, but more precisely stated, the Word of life, as Jesus Christ, became flesh. The association of life with the manifestation of Jesus Christ in the flesh runs throughout the first Epistle (2:24-25; 5:11-13), but this association is not presented just as a doctrinal truth for the purpose of apologetic debate. It is presented as an experiential reality for the believers’ participation in the divine life in Christ through their continual abiding in God and God’s abiding in them (2:6, 24, 27-28; 3:6, 24; 4:12-13, 15-16).

The essence of the spirit of antichrist, consequently, is not just a denial of the fact that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh but a denial of the experience that issues from Jesus Christ coming in the flesh as the Word of life. John defines the spirit of antichrist in relation to a function of spirit, not to a function of the mind, saying, “Every *spirit* which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every *spirit* which does not confess Jesus is not of God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming and now is already in the world” (vv. 2-3, emphasis added). While the confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh activates the spiritual operation of the Word of life that proves the regenerated spirit of a believer, a denial that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh confirms the absence of the operation of the Word of life in the unregenerate spirit of the denying unbeliever.

The Word of life, who was manifested in the flesh, was heard, seen, and handled.

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Verse 1 of chapter 1 says, “That which was from the beginning, which we heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life.”

First, *have heard*, then *have seen*; after having seen, *beheld*, gazed at with a purpose, and *handled*, touched with hands. These expressions indicate that the Word of life is not only mysterious but also tangible, because He was incarnated. The mysterious Word of life was touched by man, not only in His humanity before His resurrection (Mark 3:10; 5:31) but also in His spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) after His resurrection (John 20:17, 27). At that time there was a heresy that denied the incarnation of the Son of God (4:1-3). Hence, such strong expressions to indicate the Lord’s solid substance in His touchable humanity were needed. (Lee, Recovery Version, 1:1, note 4)

Verse 1 confirms that Jesus Christ as the Word of life was manifested as a genuine man who could be heard, seen, and even handled both before His death and even after His resurrection. Verse 2 speaks of the apostles’ response to the manifestation of Jesus Christ as the Word of life, saying, “(And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us).” The Word of life was seen in the person and work of Christ in the days of His flesh (Heb. 5:7), the Word of life was testified corporately through the operation of the divine life in the believers following His death and resurrection (Rom. 5:10; 6:10; Phil. 2:16), and the Word of life was reported by the believers following His ascension and His coming as the Spirit of power on the day of Pentecost so that the fellowship of the divine life in the Word of life could be enlarged in those whom the Father has given to the Son (Acts 1:8; 5:20; John 17:6).

**T**he apostles testified of the Word of life in the same way that Jesus Christ, as the Word of life, testified of His divinity in His humanity in His human living, death, and resurrection. According to John, the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh as the Word of life was testified by water, blood, and the Spirit: “This is He who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ; not in the water only, but in the water and in the blood; and the Spirit is He who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality. For there are three who testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are unto the one thing” (1 John 5:6-8).

Witness Lee comments on the significance of water, blood, and the Spirit as the elements that characterized and confirmed the testimony that the Word of life had come as a man in the person of Jesus Christ:

He, Jesus Christ, came as the Son of God that we might be born of God and have the divine life (John 10:10; 20:31). It is in His Son that God gives us eternal life (vv. 11-13). Jesus, the man of Nazareth, was attested to be the Son of God by the water He went through in His baptism (Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:31), by the blood He shed on the cross (John 19:31-35; Matt. 27:50-54), and also by the Spirit He gave not by measure (John 1:32-34; 3:34). By these three God has testified that Jesus is His Son given to us (vv. 7-10), that in Him we may receive His eternal life by believing into His name (vv. 11-13; John 3:16, 36; 20:31). (Recovery Version, 1 John 5:6, note 1)

In the water of His baptism, Jesus Christ demonstrated His divinity in His humanity by fulfilling all righteousness related to God’s dispensational demand (Matt. 3:15), articulated through John the Baptist, that everything of the old creation needed to be terminated in order for the divine life to be generated in humanity. Following Jesus Christ’s testimony of water, God declared from the heavens, “This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I have found My delight” (v. 17). As God in His divinity, baptism was not a requirement for Jesus Christ, but “as a typical man, a real Israelite, ... He had to be baptized in order to keep this dispensational practice of God; otherwise, He

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would not have been right with God” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 15, note 1). The Lord not only fulfilled all righteousness as a man, but by signifying that His humanity was being put to death so that it could rise in resurrection through baptism, He testified that He would not minister “in a natural way but in the way of resurrection. By being baptized, He was able to live and minister in resurrection even before His actual death and resurrection three and a half years later” (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 16, note 1). Even though Jesus Christ did not have indwelling sin in His flesh, His flesh was related to the old creation, and this human flesh had to be terminated through His baptism as a typical man.

In the blood of His death, Jesus Christ demonstrated His divinity in His humanity by obtaining an eternal redemption through His human blood (Heb. 9:12), which was also the blood of God (Acts 20:28), by virtue of His offering up of Himself through the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14). Following Jesus Christ’s testimony of blood, a Roman centurion declared from the base of the cross, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54). In Jesus Christ’s testifying death, He dealt with sin, sins, the world, and the works of the devil. He was manifested to propitiate for our sins and to take away our sins (1 John 2:2; 4:10; 3:5), He was manifested so that we could overcome the world by believing that Jesus is the Son of God (5:5), and He was manifested in the flesh as the Son of God to destroy the works of the devil (3:8).

In the Spirit in His resurrection, Jesus Christ demonstrated His divinity in His humanity by being enlivened with the divine life in His humanity and by subsequently being raised bodily from among the dead (1 Pet. 3:18). Following Jesus Christ’s testimony of the Spirit, He was designated the Son of God in power in His humanity and acknowledged by God: “You are My Son; this day have I begotten You” (Heb. 1:5). Now, as the last Adam who became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), Jesus Christ continues to demonstrate that divinity is in humanity by giving life, even the Spirit of life, to all those who believe. The Lord’s testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit should also be our testimony. In verses 6 through 8 of 1 John 5, John speaks of the Lord’s humanity being testified by water, blood, and the Spirit, but then in the ensuing verses, he speaks of this testimony being in us:

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, because this is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son. He who believes into the Son of God *has the testimony in himself*; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. (vv. 9-11, emphasis added)

The eternal life in us testifies of God, and this testimony is greater than the Christ-denying testimony of men. Furthermore, the testimony of God in us is related to life, the Word of life, who was manifested. If the manifestation of God was testified through water, blood, and the Spirit, then our ongoing testimony that God has been manifested in the flesh in us should also be a testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit. But such a testimony is largely missing in today’s Christianity, and in this missing testimony, the spirit of antichrist is unwittingly tolerated and even advanced.

### The Spirit of Antichrist in Today’s Christianity

The testimony that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is a testimony of termination through water, redemption through blood, and germination in the divine life through the Spirit. Without an ongoing termination of the things in the old creation through water, without an ongoing redemptive separation from sins and the world through the cleansing blood, and without an ongoing participation in the fellowship of the divine life, today’s Christianity is void of a genuine testimony that Jesus Christ has come in the

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flesh. Instead, there is, in actuality, a subjective denial, an experiential denial, that God has sent His Son in the flesh.

An experiential denial that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh as the Word of life is the hallmark of today's Christianity. This denial is an issue of a longterm presentation and acceptance of teachings that differ from the Word of God regarding the divine economy that makes the Word of life available to redeemed and regenerated humanity. This deviation from the truth is not a recent phenomenon.

It started in the time of the apostle Paul, when all who were in Asia began to turn away from him (2 Tim. 1:15), when believers with ears itching for something new no longer tolerated the healthy teaching of life but instead heaped up to themselves teachers who would cater to their desires (4:3). And it has culminated in this day and age in a simplistic gospel that promises a glorious and extravagant mansion in heaven and an everlasting life in the presence of God. This gospel is in sharp contrast to Paul's gospel, which proclaimed the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life, the divine life, and incorruption, the incorruption that is a consequence of receiving the divine life, to light (1:10), fulfilling the promise of life (v. 1).

**T**he inclusion of the believers into the fellowship of the divine, eternal life, the fellowship of the Father and the Son through the Spirit, has been reduced to a notion of little more than living forever. Who in Christianity reads John 3:16 as anything more than a promise of living forever, rather than what it truly says concerning receiving the eternal life of God? Who in Christianity reads John 10:10 as anything more than a promise of material abundance, rather than what it truly says concerning the abundant availability of the divine life in every believer? And who in Christianity reads 1 John 5:12 as anything more than a doctrinal verse to use in the dogmatic preaching of a gospel focused on delivering unbelievers from hell, rather than what it truly says concerning the mutual coinhering of the believers in the Son because of their mutual participation in the divine life? The emphasis on life in today's Christianity has faded almost to the point of extinction, and with it, the life that is in the Word, that is available, that produces a testimony that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is equally diminished in the believers' experience.

And so, we should honestly ask ourselves, where is the testimony of the termination of the things of the old creation in today's Christianity, the testimony of water? Where is the testimony of overcoming sins and the world in today's Christianity, the testimony of blood? And where is the testimony of the operation of the life-giving Spirit in today's Christianity, the testimony of the Spirit? Rather than a testimony of termination, there is a testimony of embracing the methods and thoughts that emerge from the vanity resident within the unregenerate mind of humans living in the old creation. Rather than a testimony of separation from sins and the world, there is a testimony of embracing the latest worldly fads in hopes of "making the truth relevant" to ever more skeptical but entertainment-oriented unbelievers. And rather than a testimony of the germinating power of the divine life, there is a testimony of dead and functionless members of Christ.

The testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit applies not only to Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh but also to all the believers.<sup>2</sup> We have been baptized, we have been redeemed, and we have received the Spirit, and so we should have such a testimony.

The water of baptism terminates people of the old creation by burying them; the blood shed on the cross redeems those whom God has chosen from among the old creation; and the Spirit, who is the truth, the reality in life (Rom. 8:2), germinates those whom God has redeemed out of the old creation, by regenerating them with the divine life. Thus they are born of God and become His children (John 3:5, 15; 1:12-13) and live a life that

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practices the truth (1:6), the will of God (2:17), the righteousness of God (2:29), and the love of God (3:10-11) for His expression. (Lee, Recovery Version, 5:6, note 1)<sup>3</sup>

In today's Christianity, as an organized expression of religion, there is no testimony of water, no testimony of the termination of the old creation. Instead, there is a testimony of Christianity's wholesale adoption of various organizational principles and psychological methods that are hallmarks of the old creation: The Bible is used as a primer for ordering one's life and promoting human character as if the letter of Scripture has the power to perfect a person apart from the life that is in the word. There is a proliferation of Christian books that promote leadership and organizational principles, all of which pay lip service to discreetly considered verses in the Bible according to the authors' own interpretations. There is Christian counseling that is "Christ-centered" in name, but in reality involves attempts to treat damaged souls only with psychological methods that are based on the same functions of the soul that were damaged by the fall. There is a great confidence in the self's ability to effectuate changes in outward behavior as if self-adjustments can actually remove the spots and blemishes within us that are the source of our outward condition. This confidence is rooted in the thought that it is possible to know and change the incurably wicked heart that we all possess. The thoughts and intentions of our darkened hearts, however, are indiscernible to Christians living in the soul, the seat of the old man in the old creation. The only discernment that is effectual comes from contacting the living and operative word of God, but this is a realm that Christian pop psychology, masked as positive thinking, moral teachings, and relationship advice, can never touch.

WITHOUT A GENUINE EXPERIENTIAL TERMINATION OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE OLD CREATION IN US, THERE IS VERY LITTLE POWER IN CHRISTIANITY TO OVERTHROW THE HUMAN REASONINGS AND HIGH THINGS THAT RISE UP AGAINST THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The most disconcerting aspect of Christianity's embrace of self-help methods is the thought that the individualized improvement of an individual is God's goal. There is no broader, eternal view that matches God's desire for the building up of the church as a spiritual house for the mutual indwelling of God in man and man in God. And there is little revelation that the church, as the one new man in the new creation, can be built up only through the believers' experience of the divine life, the life that the Son of God came in the flesh to give; the church cannot be built up with methods and practices that have a form of godliness but deny its power.

Without the experiential termination of the methods and practices of the old creation in our being, confidence in the ability of the flesh to perfect itself in Christianity will not abate. For example, when a Christian encounters a troubling human circumstance or a significant obstacle to self-advancement and proclaims, "I can do all things in Him who empowers me," the phrase *I can do* is almost always viewed as an affirmation of the positive utility of self-effort. While there is almost always a humble acknowledgment that this individual effort has been aided by God's empowering, it is still a power that is employed in the service of the self. Rarely is there a realization that God's empowering is not related to doing things for ourselves but for living in contentment in every circumstance for the sake of the gospel, and even more rarely is there an appreciation that this power is operative only to the extent that we are in Christ, that is, in His life. Because it is without a genuine experiential termination of the elements of the old creation in us, there is very little real power in Christianity, especially the power that is needed to overthrow the human reasonings and high things that rise up against the knowledge of God. By unwittingly relying upon the wisdom of the world for its living and its work, Christianity is fortifying, rather than overthrowing, the strongholds of the old creation in the minds of the believers. Although this wisdom is foolishness in the eyes of God, it is not foolishness in the eyes of fallen and unregenerate humanity, and increasingly, it is not foolishness in the eyes of believers. The more that today's Christianity relies upon the wisdom of the world, the more it fails in its calling to testify that God in the Son became a man in the flesh to impart the divine life as a seed of life into created, redeemed, and regenerated humanity so that there can be a fuller corporate manifestation of the Christ who was manifested in the flesh.

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In today's Christianity, as an organized expression of religion, there is little or no testimony of blood, no testimony of a redemptive separation from the world and little awareness of the power of indwelling sin, which is the source of our sins. Instead, there is a testimony of union with the ways of the world, ways that are rooted in lust and pride: The Bible is used to justify the use of worldly methods in order to become all things to all men in order to promote the gospel, to justify copycat forms of "Christian entertainment," and to justify works in the name of the Lord, which at their root are lawless in nature. There is a proliferation of Christian books that titillate with romance stories, intrigue with suspense stories about supernatural forces, and distract with fantastic fabrications concerning visits to heaven, most of which serve only a deep-seated desire for base gain. There is a wholesale use of marketing methods and the cooptation of worldly slogans to advance the gospel, but all that is really advanced is the impression that there is little difference between Christ and the world. When the world becomes a template for Christian thought and activity, the creature rather than the Creator is lauded and Christian idols are elevated. As such, there is no separation from the world but rather a love for the world that is fashioned according to the present age, a love that is gilded with Christian nomenclature but ultimately indicative of a less than pure heart, a heart motivated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life. There is little application of the precious blood that redeemed us from the vain manner of life handed down from our fathers, and there is little realization that we should not be of the world even though we are in the world.

There is also little realization of our need for the continual cleansing of the blood because we not only commit occasional sins but also have a nature of sin whose aim is to compel us to practice sin. Even though we would like to live according to the law of good that was implanted in our God-created humanity, we are powerless to respond, because a stronger law was implanted in our bodily members in the fall, the law of sin. When the law of sin wars against the law in our mind, it always prevails and always takes us captive. In spite of the repetitive and deadening outcome of this warfare, there is a singular emphasis in Christianity on doing good and abstaining from evil, even though the knowledge of both good and evil is fruit from the same tree. Rather than seeing that the knowledge of good and evil only promotes and reinforces the power of the law of sin in our members, there are endless exhortations to live according to the law of good, which neutralizes the operation of the law of the Spirit of life in our spirit. While there is an emphasis on doing good in every human religious construct in the world, the Christian distinctive should be an emphasis on the divine life, not on doing good. By its deviation and focus on doing good, Christianity has relinquished its right to the tree of life, that is, its right to come to Christ in order to participate in the fellowship of His divine life, a fellowship that alone can deliver us from the practices of sin in our body. The more that today's Christianity relies upon the ways of the world, the more it fails in its calling to testify of a love for the Father who sent His Son to come in the flesh of a man to implant the divine seed that cannot sin within created, redeemed, and regenerated humanity (1 John 3:9).

**I**n today's Christianity, as an organized expression of religion, there is no testimony of the Spirit, no testimony of the germinating operation of the Spirit of life that enlivens the believers and brings them into fellowship not only with the Triune God but also with one another. Instead, there is a testimony of dead, functionless, and divided members of Christ: The Bible is used to elevate Christian practices that are not essential items of the common faith, which put up dividing walls between the believers and suppress the function in life that is unique in every member for the supply of the divine life to other members. There is a proliferation of Christian books on church building, church planting, and church missions, as if the building up of the church is dependent upon better organizational principles, such as tailoring topically relevant messages to various ethnic groups in a community. There is an unwillingness

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to entrust the building up of the Body to the Body, due to a grasping for position that is motivated by a love to be first. There is an implicit consent to a continuation of a clergy-laity system on the part of both the “clergy” and the “laity.” Thus, the church has a name that it is living, but it is dead, and the church is neither hot nor cold toward the Lord, who is standing outside the door and knocking. There is a measurement of success based on “membership” numbers, and so every ensuing outreach effort mixes tares with the wheat, adds leaven to the fine flour, and produces a great house filled not only with gold and silver vessels that contain the divine life through the redeeming blood of Christ but also with wooden and earthen vessels. There is division upon division in the great house of Christianity in stark contrast to the testimony of oneness that is produced through the experience of water, blood, and the Spirit. There are divisions along doctrinal, racial, ethnic, and class lines; divisions sustained by cultural considerations and dispositional preferences; and divisions based on personality. And every division is tolerated by the other divisions so that the hypocrisy of one’s division will not be challenged or blatantly exposed by the others. While a multitude of justifications for division bribe the conscience of a believer into accepting the status quo of division, the presence of division is easily recognized, ironically, by unbelievers, and it serves as a significant impediment to advancing the full counsels of God to an unbelieving world. The more that today’s Christianity displays the deadness that comes from not holding forth the word of life, the more it fails in its calling to testify that God in Christ has come to gather redeemed and regenerated humanity into the very oneness that is sourced in the fellowship of the divine life of the sending Triune God.

The spirit of antichrist is rampant in today’s Christianity. This spirit is both coming and now is, and there are many in Christianity who are antichrists in principle, sentiment, and practice (1 John 2:18), even if unwittingly. However, the denial that Jesus Christ is the Christ, whether as a statement of truth by unbelievers or as an experiential reality by believers, does not have to stand, and it can be overcome by the experiential application of the water, the blood and the Spirit.

### Overcoming the Spirit of Antichrist

The practical application of the experience of the water is to walk in the light as God is in the light (1:7). Such a walk is a walk in the new creation, not in the old creation; it is a walk in the fellowship of the Father and the Son (vv. 3, 7), not a walk in identification with the old man corrupted by sin and death. The light that overcomes the darkness of the old creation is in the life of the new creation, the life that came in the Son of God and that has been given to us: “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). In the life that is within us, there is the power to walk by the Spirit and the capacity to participate in the divine fellowship that is apart from every lingering experiential vestige of the old creation (Gal. 5:16). By walking in the light, there is an ongoing experience of the blood.

And when we have a failure, which occurs more often than we would like to think, the practical application of the blood is to confess our sins so that the cleansing power of the blood can be activated to bring us back into the fellowship of the divine life in the divine light (1 John 1:9). The application of the blood also involves loving the Father with the love that He has loved us with and that separates us from a love for the world. We need to be confessing and loving Christians, continually turning to the Lord for His covering and cleansing and not being ashamed to proclaim our love for Him.

The practical application of the experience of the Spirit is to heed the move of the anointing Spirit in our spirit, an anointing that teaches us to abide in the Son and the Father (2:20, 24, 27). The anointing is the moving of the life-giving Spirit in us; it is the daily and moment-by-moment leading of the living God, the God of life. The first



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Epistle of John is a testimony of the experience of the fellowship of the divine life, a fellowship that bears no imprint of the old creation, a fellowship that is separated from the world and sins, and a fellowship that is sustained by the life-generating Spirit in our spirit. Ultimately, it is a fellowship that needs to be guarded from the idols of today's Christianity—the ways of the old creation, the ways of the world and sin, and the ways of dead practices, all of which experientially deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh as the Word of life.

**I**n the spirit of antichrist, there is an experiential denial in today's Christianity that the Son of God has come in the flesh. In the fellowship of the Father and the Son, however, there is an experiential affirmation and testimony that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has come in the flesh as the Word of life to impart the divine life into redeemed and regenerated humanity. This reality was testified in the human living of Jesus Christ through water, blood, and the Spirit, and this reality needs to be testified in the church through water, blood, and the Spirit. Without such a testimony, the operation of the spirit of antichrist that is now in the world will continue to grow and expand to the point that today's Christianity will be nothing more than a systemized expression of the world in the guise of religion. As children of the light, we should not have fellowship with such elements of darkness. May the Lord have mercy on us all, and may the greater One in us bring us into the reality of the testimony that God is well pleased to testify. **LC**

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The subjects of the first and second Epistles of John are taken from Witness Lee's outline of each book as presented in the Recovery Version of the Bible.

<sup>2</sup>In 1 John 5:4-13, a section that speaks of overcoming the world, death, sin, the devil, and idols by the eternal life in the Son, the emphasis is clearly on the testimony of the believers, a testimony that should match the Lord's testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit. For the purposes of this article, I have followed the sequence of the water, the blood, and the Spirit that is presented in latter half of verse 6, but John is much more flexible and experiential. At the beginning of verse 6, only *water* and *blood* are paired together, "in the water and in the blood," while the Spirit is spoken of as the means for the testifying of the water and the blood, "and the Spirit is He who testifies, because the Spirit is the reality." But in verse 7 John says that "there are three who testify," and when he orders the three in verse 8, he speaks of "the Spirit and the water and the blood." This, I think, speaks of the necessity of the Spirit for the believers' experience of the reality of the water—the termination of the elements of the old creation that are still in us—and of the blood—the separation from our sinful acts and our lusts that are still in us related to the world.

It is also interesting to note that in every reference to the three, *water* precedes *blood*. In our initial experience of salvation, we believe, and the blood is applied to our sins, which is then followed by the water of baptism. But in these verses John puts *water* before *blood*, following the sequence of the Lord's experience, an experience of living a terminated life even before the physical termination of His life and the shedding of His redemptive blood on the cross. Through the Spirit we should always live such a terminated life but then quickly apply the cleansing blood through confession when acts of sin overtake us occasionally (1:7-9; 3:9). The sequence of water and blood follows the sequence of walking in the light and then being cleansed by the blood.

<sup>3</sup>In footnote 1 for 1 John 5:6, this quoted portion immediately follows Witness Lee's application of the words *water*, *blood*, and *the Spirit* to the experience of Jesus Christ in His human living on earth, pairing Jesus Christ's testimony of water, blood, and the Spirit with the testimony of the believers.

### Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes and Outlines. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 2003. Print.

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