

“This is the deceiver and the antichrist” 2 John 1:7

ANTICHRIST ARCH-DECEIVER



His Character

His Nature

His Ways



ERIC H.H. CHANG

Antichrist Arch-Deceiver

From the Foreword: Many books have been written on the Antichrist, and these exhibit a great diversity in content, style, and interpretation method. Please let me explain where the present book fits within this diversity, so that you can decide whether it is the right book for you.

This book *Antichrist Arch-Deceiver* is a collection of sermons on the Antichrist by Eric H.H. Chang. It is a biblical-expository work that is marked by a devotional style, a sense of urgency, and deep pastoral care.

Most significantly, it disagrees with almost every modern book on the Antichrist on several fronts. This is evident when we look at its thesis which can be broken down into the following points: the Antichrist is a pseudo Christ rather than a contra Christ; he is a religious figure rather than a political dictator; he comes from the church, not outside the church; and the pillar of his satanic work is deception rather than persecution.

As we go through the book, spiritual lessons are gleaned along the way and applied to our Christian lives, in order that we may be ready for the Antichrist when he appears.



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ANTICHRIST ARCH-DECEIVER

His Character, His Nature, His Ways



Eric H.H. Chang

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As a result, it has more pages than the Kindle paperback edition (ISBN 979-8397250351) despite having the same text.

This title is also available as a Kindle e-book (ASIN B0C8NRK5PK), which is ideal for notetaking and highlighting, with synchronization across all your Kindle devices (iOS, Android, Windows, macOS).

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Eric H.H. Chang

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Foreword

Bentley C.F. Chan

Many books have been written on the Antichrist, and these exhibit a great diversity in content, style, and interpretation method. Please let me explain where the present book fits within this diversity, so that you can decide whether it is the right book for you.

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Like all things eschatological, the topic of the Antichrist can take one of several paths. If you are only interested in end-time speculations, may I direct you to some other books

that are brimming with end-time predictions? These books disagree wildly with one another in how they read the Old Testament, decipher symbolic language, build timelines, and interpret world events.

The pursuit of the speculative for curiosity's sake will go off the rails if we, at the same time, fail to see that when the Bible speaks of the last days, *its foremost concern is with our spiritual victory and survival*—so that we will not succumb to the satanic forces roiling this age of deception and lawlessness.

This book strikes a good balance. It avoids sensationalism on the one hand, yet does not dismiss end-time predictions outrightly on the other. Instead, it dives deep into the person of the Antichrist, and identifies *deception* as the deadliest aspect of his work.

As we go through the book, spiritual lessons are gleaned along the way and applied to our Christian lives, in order that we may be ready for the Antichrist when he appears.

These spiritual lessons apply to us because *the Antichrist is a man*. As a human being, he shares our worldliness, our wicked ways, our evil thinking, though in his case these are raised to satanic levels. In studying the ways of the Antichrist, we will gain insight into our own condition, so that our spirits may be transformed by the Holy Spirit.

This book was not written in the calm and quiet of a study, but is a collection of urgent messages delivered by Pastor

Chang in the late 1980s, and recently edited by me. We are now in the year 2023 as I write, yet these timeless messages remain fresh and relevant when we read them today.

An example of their relevance today is the proliferation of photoshopped images, deepfake videos, and fake news disseminated via social media. Can we even fathom how the Antichrist will harness these forces of deception? And this is just the start. With remarkable prescience, Chang stresses again and again that the true danger posed by the Antichrist *is deception rather than persecution*.

In the midst of global warming, economic chaos, the emerging AI threat, and wars and rumors of war, may Yahweh our God prepare our hearts and souls as we move closer and closer to the coming of his son Jesus Christ, judge of nations and our blessed hope.

Maranatha!

Bentley C.F. Chan

Montreal, Canada, June 17, 2023

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Bible passages in this book are taken from English Standard Version (ESV) and sometimes from New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB) or New Jerusalem Bible (NJB). For short quotes, the Bible version is usually not stated, but is ESV or NASB in most cases.

To know more about the author, you can read his testimony at <https://www.christiandc.org/content/ehhc-testimony>

Chapter 1

Resurrection and the Antichrist

¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:1–5, ESV)

The Lord lays it upon my heart to speak about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is still a spirit of prophecy in the church today, and there is a general feeling

that the Lord's coming is very near. I will concentrate on one aspect relating to the Lord's coming, an important one: *the Antichrist*, the man of sin, a frightening figure. Some believe that he is already in the world.

The prophesied apostasy

2 Thessalonians 2:1–5, quoted above, speaks of the Antichrist in connection with the great apostasy that will take place shortly before the coming of the Lord Jesus. Apostasy is the falling away from Christ. Since no one can turn away from Christ without first coming to him, this apostasy has everything to do with Christians. In the last days, multitudes of Christians will turn away from Christ. But don't get the wrong idea. It doesn't mean that the church will suddenly become empty. Christians will continue to go to church, but they will no longer be faithful to the Lord Jesus. In fact they will tune their ears to other doctrines:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Timothy 4:3–4, ESV)

This will be the situation of the church before the Lord comes again.

The man of lawlessness

The passage in 2 Thessalonians mentions something remarkable about the Antichrist, called the man of lawlessness: *he will be revealed* (v.3). At the present time he is hidden, but he will be revealed when the situation in the church and in the world is ripe for his activities. Then he will show his true self. This man of lawlessness is also called the “son of destruction” (“son of perdition,” KJV), who will oppose—and exalt himself above—every so-called god or object of worship (v.4). He will take his seat in the temple of God, and proclaim himself God. Proud and self-exalting, he is the very opposite of the Lord Jesus who humbled himself. The Lord was already referring to the Antichrist when he said, “I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him.” (John 5:43, ESV)

The opposition to holiness

Let us talk about holiness for a few minutes, so that when the man of lawlessness appears in his unholiness, he can be identified. Christians who are unfamiliar with the teaching

of holiness will be deceived because they won't be able to recognize the Antichrist when he appears.

Some years ago, I preached holiness at a Christian conference in North America, and do you know who opposed my preaching? In a conference of almost a thousand people, it was not the lay brothers and sisters *but the pastors* who opposed the teaching of holiness. My conference message was based on Hebrews 12:14: "without holiness no one will see the Lord." This statement comes straight from the Bible, and was not something that I invented.

And they kicked up a storm over a verse which I preached from the Bible. I am almost ready to weep at this. They told me to define my doctrine, and I told them it is in the Bible. The pastors confronted me, saying, "Why do you preach holiness? This is salvation by works!" I couldn't believe my ears. What? Holiness is salvation by works? Does anyone really think we can become holy in our own strength?

The pastors warned me: "Change your message or we will give you trouble." I did not change my message—God is my witness—and I never will. I will preach holiness to the day I die.

True to their word, they have given me trouble all over the world—everywhere! Why? Because I preach holiness. When John Wesley preached holiness over two centuries ago, they threw him out of the church. He was a pastor in the Anglican Church, the Church of England, yet he was barred from

preaching at any Anglican Church in England. So he had to preach outdoors in the open air.

Why would pastors, of all people, oppose the teaching of holiness? I presume that they have studied a bit of theology at some seminary. They ought to know it is impossible to be holy except by grace—that amazing grace that “saved a wretch like me.” I preach holiness because God saved a wretch like me, making a saint out of a sinner. Is that not glorious? Yet the pastors tell us not to preach holiness.

I challenged the pastors to prove me wrong from Scripture. So far no one has taken up my challenge. I made it clear to them that if I had said anything false, I will apologize to this conference—and to any conference in the world. I said to them, “Prove me wrong from Scripture and I will apologize and confess my sin. Select the best of your scholars and I will debate you in public, in Hong Kong, Canada, or the United States—anywhere.” But no one has dared to come out in the open. They only attack me behind my back.

I am not saying these things to justify myself. I count it a privilege to suffer a little bit for the sake of Christ. I have suffered too little for him. So if he should grant me the privilege of suffering a little bit more for him, I would thank him from the depths of my heart. But I weep for the church of God which I love, and for the brothers and sisters whom I love—the very ones who were not allowed to listen to the truth. Let

this sink into your mind: Without holiness no one will see the Lord. This is from the word of God.

We are reaping the consequences of the neglect of holiness. I recently heard the news of a member of a church in Canada who was sentenced to life for murder. A Christian who commits murder? And why? Because he was told by the church that once you are saved, you are always saved, even if you commit murder. So why not commit murder? Why not commit adultery? Why not rob and steal?

Paul says that the apostasy will come when people will no longer listen to the truth, especially the truth about holiness. They want to remain as Christians yet have the freedom to sin. I am sick of the wishy-washy Christianity that makes the non-Christians say, "Why should I become a Christian? Look at that Christian over there! I'm better than him!" And they are right. Many non-Christians are better than Christians. I make no defense about it, at least not until these Christians are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Until then, there is no Christianity to talk about.

Without holiness no man shall see God. And no one can be holy except by God's saving grace and mercy through the Holy Spirit who transforms sinners into saints. Paul calls Christians "saints".

Holiness: A light in the world

Yesterday I shared a goal with my wife: that, by the grace of God, no one, especially no Christian, who commits adultery or fornication or slander or any other kind of sin, can sit in this church and remain comfortable, smiling and twiddling his thumbs, enjoying a soothing message on so-called “grace”. May the stress on holiness become so unbearable to him that he either leaves this church never to return, or cries out to the Lord, “Forgive me! Have mercy on me! Cleanse me so that on that day I may see your face!” I want a church free of complacent Christians who think nothing of leaving a church service to play mahjong or gamble at the racecourse, causing the non-Christians to say, “What’s a church elder doing in a place like this?” May this church shine brightly with a light that causes people to repent or become uncomfortable. The Bible talks about a light that cannot be hidden, that exposes the surrounding darkness. It is by this light that you become an outstanding Christian in your school or place of work.

I am a pastor, yet I do know something about secular life. I have worked in the world. In the school where I taught, it was my aim to conduct myself so that my fellow teachers will ask, “What makes him so unusual, so different, so unique?” That aim was fulfilled in every respect, and I didn’t even have to wear any special clothes like black clerical garments. I have

never worn a clerical collar in all my years as a pastor. If I need a collar before I am recognized by others as a Christian and a preacher, something must be amiss with me.

The school could not understand what made me so different. They were amazed that as soon as I walked into a classroom, the whole class of unruly students would be quiet immediately. I did not scold or shout at my students; I did not send them out for corporal punishment. Every student remained quiet in his seat, listening attentively to the word of God. My fellow teachers were amazed, and wondered what my secret was. That secret was God's power working through me.

Three years after I left the school, I met a stranger who, after hearing of my name, asked me: "I've heard of you before. Didn't you teach at such and such a school in Liverpool?" Yes, I said. Then he said, "No wonder! I have heard about you there." Some three years later, they were still talking about that unusual teacher who elicited good behavior from his students with a reputation for unruliness. Such is God's power working in holiness; and because the power is his, the glory belongs to him alone.

The coming of the Lord Jesus

I have something to say to the non-Christians here. This series of messages will not be so technical or theological that

you cannot understand what I am talking about. I want to speak very simply, and to your heart. The coming of Jesus has everything to do with you as non-Christians. Do not think that it has only to do with Christians.

When the Lord Jesus came the first time, he came in humility. He was despised and rejected. Choosing the path of suffering and humiliation, he was mocked and spat upon.

But when he comes again, a different picture will emerge: he will come in glory, power, and majesty. His glory will be manifested to the ends of the earth. Your own eyes will witness his glorious coming. Those living in sin and unholiness will find his glory unbearable, and will call upon the mountains to hide them from the face of God and from the Lamb (Revelation 6:16).

Farfetched though it may seem, as surely as Jesus came the first time, he will come a second time. Whether you are dead or alive when he comes, you will definitely see him, because everyone will be raised to face the judgment. God has appointed a judge: the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22, 27). Whether you believe in his coming or not, does not change the fact of his coming, just as refusing to believe in the planet Mars does not take it out of existence.

The picture of his first coming is familiar enough: the mockery, the physical abuse, the crown of thorns, the blood running down his face, and finally crucifixion as a criminal—he died for you and for me. The world paid him no attention

in any serious way, and to this day it still does not. Everyone pays attention to trivialities: bargain sales, shopping centers, job promotions, salary increases. Who has time to listen to this talk about eternal life?

What has happened to our sense of values? Unimportant things are occupying our minds. In restaurants I hear conversations coming from the neighboring tables. What do people talk about? Trivialities. The human mind is pitiful—so capable and intelligent, yet so easily occupied with trivialities. Satan has been successful in his work on man in preparing the way for the Antichrist.

The resurrection

It is not easy to talk about the Antichrist because some background information is needed. I do not, however, wish to speak about the Antichrist in an academic fashion, but to show how all this applies to your life.

I start with the resurrection. How it relates to the Antichrist will become evident. There is such a thing as the resurrection. I am not talking about some vague resurrection in the future, but an actual phenomenon: bodily resurrection. The word “resurrection” (Greek *anastasis*) appears not even once in the Old Testament, though there are indirect references to the resurrection in the OT. But in the New Testament, “resurrection” occurs 42 times, not counting

other words and phrases that refer to the resurrection (e.g. “He is risen” or “raised up”)—these add up to hundreds of occurrences. Resurrection from the dead is a key idea in the New Testament.

Actual cases of resurrection

In my student days in England, I knew a fine brother by the name of Dr. Lo. He went to England to write his medical exams because his training in China was not recognized in that part of the world. He shared with me that when he was a young doctor, he was sent to a certain village in Guangdong province to look after a number of patients. The villagers knew him to be a Christian, and he proclaimed the glory of the Lord wherever he went.

But one day, a patient of his—an elderly woman—died. The worst that could happen to a young doctor on his first assignment is for a patient to die on him. He said to himself, “Everyone in the village knows that I am a Christian, and now they will know that my patient died on me!” He tried to revive the patient using everything he had learned from his medical training, but in vain. Anxious and desperate, he pleaded with the only other local doctor for help: “Please help me, my patient just died!” That doctor could only say, “What can I do? Am I God? If she’s dead she’s dead.” Dr. Lo rechecked the patient, and she had indeed died. Then he cried out to the

Lord: “What am I going to do? What will happen to my Christian witness in this village?” With tears running down his face, he fell on his knees and prayed. Suddenly he heard a cough, and saw movement in the woman’s eyelids. Color was returning to her face, and she was coming back to life! As a medical doctor, he was qualified to tell whether she was dead or alive, whereas we non-professionals may give a wrong assessment. This instance of resurrection is not at all unique.

Everywhere I travel and in every major town I pass through, I would check whether there is a local Christian bookstore. I would usually look for theological works but there was one time I saw an interesting, non-theological book that was on sale at the irresistible price of \$1.99. It was a collection of testimonies of what God had been doing in the lives of people (e.g. healing cancer patients). I will now recount a few of these testimonies since they have to do with the resurrection. I restrict myself to those cases of resurrection where the death was confirmed by a medical doctor or surgeon.

Dr. William S. Reid, an American surgeon, tells the story of his two-year-old son who had suddenly died of acute viral pneumonia while Dr. Reid had gone out to perform a surgery. When he returned, he tested his son for signs of life but the boy was already dead. All his efforts to revive his son were in vain. He fell on his knees and wept before the Lord. Soon he heard a sound. The little boy who had been dead came back

to life. Dr. Reid tells his own story in a book called *The Surgery of the Soul*.

Not long afterwards, this surgeon was called to the pediatric ward of a hospital to certify the death of a little girl who had been dead for a while. He went to her bedside, did the usual checks, stopped the resuscitator, and removed the intravenous tube from her arm. As he was about to sign the death certificate, he saw her mother weeping. Then he remembered how he himself had wept over his dead son a few weeks earlier. Then the Lord's compassion filled his heart. He felt he could not simply sign the death certificate and close the book. He cried out to the Lord, and the words in John 11:25–26 came to him: *"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and he that lives and believes in me shall never die."* He placed his hands on the little girl's head, and prayed, "Lord, you gave me back my little boy. Will you not give this little girl back to her mother?" The Lord immediately answered the prayer. The girl came back to life and was reunited with her mother.

Let me mention one more case that involved a well-known Bible teacher and writer, Dr. Michael Esses (1923–1993). He was not a medical doctor; his doctorate was in theology. Dr. Esses travelled to Mexico by car and trailer with his wife, their son, and their 12-year old daughter Kathy. (Many Americans go on holidays by towing a trailer complete with sleeping and cooking facilities.) At one point during the trip,

Kathy was leaning against the trailer door inside. The door suddenly opened, and she fell out of the trailer eight feet below, cracking her head on a concrete block. Blood was pouring out of her head. The family wrapped her in a blanket and rushed her to the nearest government hospital, but she was dead on arrival.

That government hospital was not authorized to issue death certificates, so the girl was taken to a civilian hospital for the doctors there to issue one. The Bible teacher looked to the Lord and remembered the Scripture verse which says to give thanks in all circumstances (1Th.5:18). Give thanks? How is that possible when his daughter had died such a terrible death? But he was determined to praise God in the midst of the tragedy. He praised God, and gave thanks to his name. He decided to pray for his daughter even though she was already dead with her skull split open. He said, "Lord, if you want to take my daughter, thanks be to your name. But if it is your will to revive her, her life is in your hands. Let it be done according to your will." Nothing happened. They took her body seven miles to the civilian hospital for the death certificate. There she was taken into an examination room while her parents waited outside.

Soon the doctor came out of the examination room, shouting *Americanos locos!* Although the Bible teacher hardly knew any Spanish, he understood the meaning of "loco"—it means *crazy*. He asked the doctor why he was shouting *Crazy*

Americans, and he said, “Why did you bring your daughter here? There’s nothing wrong with her!” The teacher rushed into the examination room and saw Kathy sitting up in perfect condition, though her head was shaved for the examination. There was not a scratch or a bruise on her head even though her blanket was soaked in blood.

These are not fairy tales but testimonies by responsible people who are still alive [in 1986 when this sermon was preached]. I am not talking about events that happened many years ago, but about contemporary cases. You can travel to the United States, and visit these people to find out whether the cases are true or not. I can help you locate them. Just as the Lord Jesus raised the dead, so the same power of resurrection is active today. I glory in my living God.

“I am the resurrection and the life”—are these fantastical words to be explained away by some mythological interpretation? When Jesus said he is the resurrection and the life, he meant exactly that. He raised the dead. He told Jairus’ daughter to get up, and she got up (Luke 8:41–56). In Nain he saw a woman weeping for her dead son, her only son. Like the medical doctor who had compassion on the weeping mother, the Lord Jesus had compassion on this woman in Nain. He stopped the funeral procession, ordered the casket opened, and told the young man to get up. He got up, and the funeral was changed into a celebration. (Luke 7:11–17)

In the case of Lazarus who had been dead four days, his sister Martha told the Lord that the body will have a stench (John 11:39). But Jesus ordered the stone removed, and told Lazarus to come out. What a sight! Can you imagine the reaction of the people? Some of them must have collapsed. When Pastor Joe's father died two or three years ago, Joe called me to ask whether he should pray for his father to be raised from the dead. I told him to do as the Lord leads. His mother heard all this and said, "I can't stand the thought of it. If my husband rises from the dead, I think I will die!" What glory and power! The dead are raised!

I have experienced the power of resurrection in my own life: *spiritual resurrection*. God's power of resurrection can transform the most vile sinner ("dead in trespasses and sins") and raise him to a new life. That is even more wonderful than the physical resurrection of the dead. I have seen sick people miraculously rescued from the grip of death, but to me that is not as important as spiritual resurrection. I have prayed for victims of acute ailments such as cancer, and they were completely healed without a trace of cancer. But to me, that is less impressive than the transformation of lives that I have witnessed. The power of the resurrection creates a new man. I was dead in trespasses and sins, but I was raised. If you knew me in my non-Christian days, you would doubt whether I was the same person that you see today. Indeed I am not the same person! I have become a different man. My

father saw the change in my life after I had become a Christian. Three years after I become a Christian, I visited him in Singapore. When I was about to leave, he said to me: “I have observed you for the past three days, and I want to tell you that you are a totally different person from the son I knew before. You were very bad but now you are totally different.” Such is the power of the resurrection.

Resurrection: The sign of the Antichrist

The sign of the Christ is the resurrection. The Lord himself said to the Jewish leaders: “No sign will be given to you except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matthew 12:39). He was referring to his own resurrection. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man will be dead three days. Just as Jonah came out of the fish, so the Son of Man will be raised from the dead.

The Antichrist knows this sign very well, and that the resurrection is the sign of the Christ, the sign of the New Testament age. He will try to perform the same sign in his own life, deceiving multitudes of phony Christians who cannot discern the truth. These Christians will welcome the Antichrist as Christ himself.

There is a Chinese saying: Man has the face of a human being, and the heart of a beast. This applies aptly to the Antichrist, for he is called “the beast” in Revelation 13:3. The

same verse mentions something very striking about the Antichrist, in the statement “as if it had been *slain*” (NASB). Here “slain” is the same Greek word (*sphazō*) that is applied to the Lord Jesus in v.8: “the Lamb who has been slain”. Hence the Antichrist will imitate Christ in his death. The words “as if” indicate that the death is not real, but illusory. But the imitation goes even further because the apparently fatal wound will be healed (v.3). This is an attempt to imitate Christ even in his resurrection! The Antichrist will give the appearance of being fatally wounded; the multitudes will not know that he has not actually died. Then he will give the appearance of being raised from the dead. Verses 11–12 of the same chapter talk about the second beast (the false prophet) who exercises all the authority of the first beast (the Antichrist). Verse 12 speaks of “the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed”. Verse 14 speaks of “the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.”

Surviving the deception of the Antichrist

I am talking about the resurrection because the Antichrist will try to deceive the church with an imitation sign of the resurrection. You must experience the power of the resurrection in your own life because the whole world will be deceived. Revelation 13:3 says, “And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.” Verse 8 says that “all

who dwell on the earth will worship him". The Antichrist will startle the world with a marvelous imitation of the resurrection.

Will you and I survive? You will not survive unless you have experienced in your own life the power of the resurrection, which transforms you and opens your eyes to discern the truth. The only people who won't be deceived by the Antichrist are the saints. Verse 7 says, "It was given to him to make war with the saints." Why does the Antichrist wage war against the saints, the holy ones? Because they are not deceived. They will refuse to follow and worship the beast.

The same verse says that the Antichrist will "overcome" the saints. We will be suppressed, persecuted, and put to death—just as the Lord Jesus warned in Matthew 24 concerning the last days. These saints will be faithful: "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints" (Rev.13:10). Revelation 12:11 says: "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." (NASB)

If you love this world and this life, you will not survive the Antichrist's deception and persecution. May God grant you to experience the power of the resurrection.

Chapter 2

The Cross and The Antichrist

In my last message, I talked about the resurrection in relation to the Antichrist. The Antichrist is a frightening figure to many people, and some have asked whether the Antichrist is an appropriate subject for inviting friends to our church. I can assure you that as this series of messages goes on, you will come to realize that the subject of the Antichrist is important for Christians as well as non-Christians, because the Antichrist will deceive the whole world.

Two more cases of resurrection

Last time I recounted several cases of resurrection that have taken place in modern times. I want to stress that I have not exhausted all my examples. I have many more examples, but time permits only a couple today.

There is the case of a car driver who was killed at the famous Indianapolis racetrack where cars can reach well over 150 miles per hour. Car racing is dangerous because the cars are light yet powerful. Accidents occur rather frequently, but most of them are minor. But once in a while, a truly horrific, heart-stopping accident takes place before our eyes. Sometimes it takes the form of a multiple pileup where several cars are smashed into a tangle of burning wreckage. The rescue team dashes out to the scene, ready to subdue the fire and rescue the drivers.

In my present example, a driver got involved in this type of pileup. Suddenly another car smashed into the cockpit of his car and hit him square in the head *at full speed*. It doesn't take medical knowledge to imagine what had happened to his head. His crash helmet was shattered, his skull was crushed, his head was smashed open. Many people rushed to the scene and dragged him out of the car. The racetrack doctor took his pulse and pronounced him dead.

Not so fast! Our God is the God of the resurrection (which is the point of my last message). This dead driver had two devout Christian friends—a married couple—who witnessed the whole incident at the racetrack. They rushed to the scene of the accident, and started to pray for him even though he had been dead six or seven minutes. While they were still praying, the dead man started to groan. Everyone could see that he was coming back to life. "There is sound coming from

him! He's reviving! Rush him to hospital!" So he was rushed to a hospital, with the Christian couple following behind.

The medical specialists gave him next to no hope. Even if he survives, they said, his condition would be absolutely dire because of the massive brain damage. They hurriedly arranged a brain scan in preparation for an emergency brain surgery. They took one look at the results and got the shock of their lives! They could not believe what they saw. His head was in perfect condition without the slightest damage! They took another look at his crash helmet and indeed it was all smashed up.

There is also the case of Dr. Richard E. Ebby, who is himself a physician. I said "is" because he is still alive. He fell one day, smashed his head on the concrete, died, and later came back to life. He later wrote a book *Caught Up Into Paradise* which describes how he had departed from this life and entered what he calls Paradise. It describes at length his experiences in Paradise. The incident was a turning point in his life.

All these cases demonstrate that our God is *the God of the resurrection*. The God I proclaim is not some philosophical or religious concept that nobody has time for. Who has time for philosophy or religion? My faith is not in a religion, much less a philosophy. My faith is in the living God. Not only is my God the living God, he *is the God who can raise the dead back to life*. That was the point of my previous message on the Antichrist. In that message I pointed out a crucial fact about

the Antichrist, that he knows perfectly well that the key element of the New Testament, the key characteristic of the New Testament, *is the resurrection*. This exciting and marvelous thing—resurrection from the dead—is something the Antichrist knows about.

Jesus and the resurrection

The Pharisees refused to believe in Jesus even though they had seen the miracles he had performed. Yet they said to him, “Give us one more sign, just one more spectacular sign to show us that you are the Christ, the Savior King of Israel.” But Jesus refused to entertain them with spectacular wonders, and said to them, “Because you don’t have eyes to see what I have done, you will see nothing from me except one thing: *the sign of the prophet Jonah*.” (cf. Mt.12:39)

What was the sign of the prophet Jonah? The Pharisees knew what it was, for they were well versed in the Scriptures. Jonah the prophet was in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights. Just as Jonah was dead symbolically (or literally, according to some) for three days and three nights, and came back to life, so the Son of Man will die and be buried for three days and three nights. Was his death the end of the matter? No, the Lord Jesus rose again! This sign—and no other sign—was granted to the Pharisees, and many of them did see the day of his resurrection.

Not only was the Lord Jesus raised from the dead, he himself raised others from the dead. In front of a crowd he commanded dead Lazarus to come out of the grave, and indeed he came out. In the same way, the Son of Man will one day speak to the dead and they will come forth from their graves (John 5:28–29). That is why I stress that the sign of the New Testament, the sign of Christ, is the resurrection.

In the approximately three years of his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus raised only a handful of people from the dead. In that time, many others had died but were not resurrected, for it was not the Lord's business to traverse the land, raising up everyone who had died; otherwise, he would have no time for anything else. If raising the dead was not the focus of his ministry, why did he bother to raise anyone from the dead? There was a purpose to this: to give a sign or a symbol of the important truth that *God is the God of the resurrection*.

Even today, some two thousand years after the New Testament period, God still raises the dead. Again it is only a small handful of people that he raises, but that is sufficient to remind us that he was—and still is—the God of the resurrection.

A strange thing happened when Jesus died

Strange things were happening on the day the Lord Jesus died. Darkness fell upon the land because the sun refused to

shine on an earth that put the Lord to death. Matthew 27:51–53 describes something eerie that took place immediately after Jesus died: The earth quaked powerfully and broke open many tombs. Many dead saints were raised and appeared to the people of Jerusalem!

If you visit Jerusalem today, you will be amazed by the great number of tombs all around the city. Just outside the temple area, for example, are tombs and more tombs cluttered along the hillside, down to the Kidron brook, over to the other side, and up towards the Mount of Olives. There are tombs everywhere—tombs from every century, from every age, from every locality—because everyone wants to be buried near Jerusalem, the Holy City.

Picture the situation. A mighty earthquake broke open many tombs, many of which were caves. The tremors rolled away the stones that sealed the tombs, exposing the interiors of the caves. For anyone with a stomach to peek inside, it was a most unsettling sight. To make matters more chaotic, the Sabbath was coming. Because the Jews did not work on the Sabbath, the tombs were left unattended. No one dared to venture out of his house, so that for once the entire populace was faithful in keeping the Sabbath!

But the worst was yet to come. What do we read in the passage? God's resurrection power—the same power that raised Jesus from the dead—was working so powerfully that a multitude of saints, including Old Testament saints, were

raised from the dead, and they walked straight into Jerusalem! When the Jews resumed their work after the Sabbath, they encountered a most ghastly sight: people wrapped in grave clothes and bundled up in bandages, walking about in Jerusalem. Many onlookers must have fainted. To add horror to horror, some of the resurrected saints had died only recently. Imagine answering a knock on the door, only to be greeted by a family member who had died a few weeks earlier!

Exciting things were happening in Jerusalem in the days of the Lord Jesus. I have something to tell you: Exciting things will happen in your life too if you know the living God.

Let's face reality

You may say, "I get it. You've given us examples of modern-day resurrection. I agree that the sign of Jesus is the resurrection. But I have a small problem: I have never seen anyone being raised from the dead. I wasn't there when the poor people fainted on the streets of Jerusalem."

How can we be sure that Jesus actually rose from the dead? How did Paul know that Jesus rose from the dead? Why was the resurrection such a crucial element in Paul's preaching of the gospel (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15)? He even says that if Jesus has never been resurrected, then we, of all men, are most miserable. If resurrection is not real, what are we living for?

Let's face this issue boldly and honestly. What is the use of believing in God if you are going to end up in the grave 10 years from now, 20 years from now, even 50 years from now? The human life span is miserably short compared to the length of human history. Let's get the picture right because we don't want to live in illusions. Christianity has nothing to do with illusions. Let's face the realities of life and the realities of death. Fifty years from now, maybe none of us in this meeting hall will be physically alive. My friend, you may be young now, but all too often the young die first, especially in this age.

Why do I say this? Because we live in a world full of wars. Who are the first to die during a war? Are they not teenagers and those in their twenties? People in Europe know this all too well. World War I wiped out a whole generation of young people in Britain, Germany, and the rest of Europe. Such was the scale of destruction that if you go to Europe today [1986], you will meet many elderly women who are single. They are single not because they are unattractive or unmarriageable, but because there were not enough men for them to marry in their generation. My daughter and I recently met one such lady from England. She never got married, and she explained why. Her sweetheart, a gallant young man, was sent to the front before they could ever marry. *He never came home.* Like many other young men, he never came home. And that happened to tens of thousands—No! Hundreds of thousands!—

in Britain, not to mention all the casualties in France, in Germany, in Belgium, in Russia, in China. Nobody knows how many Chinese died during World War II. Some estimate thirty million, some fifty million. In any war, it is the young who suffer the highest casualty rate.

Maybe none of us here will be physically alive fifty years from now. That is not meant to scare anybody, but we do need to face reality. Am I speaking the truth or not? Exactly what is the point of believing in a God who can do nothing for us? What is the point of putting our faith in a weak God? Do we use religion as a sedative to calm our nerves, to keep ourselves in illusion, and to give ourselves a weekly shot in the arm so that we can stay in one piece for a whole week until we crawl back to church on Sunday for another shot in the arm? If so, then we are drug peddlers of the first order. Religion *is* an opiate, and I am not going to waste my time preaching this kind of religion.

Why did Paul devote his life to preaching the gospel? Why would a man of such intelligence, and with such ability to be successful in the world, preach the gospel? Why did he put everything he had into the gospel? Because he had seen the risen Lord. Paul himself says, "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim.1:12; cf. 1 Cor.9:1).

I believe in the resurrection

You may say it was fine for Paul because he saw Jesus after his resurrection. And before that, there were 500 eyewitnesses at the same time and the same place (1 Cor.15:6). That's enough witnesses in any court of law. You may say: "That's fine, because there were many witnesses, but I myself haven't seen anything."

Maybe you do have a case. But I have something wonderful to tell you. Do you know why I believe in the resurrection? Is it because of the modern-day cases of people raised from the dead? No. Is it because the Bible talks about the resurrection that I believe in the resurrection? Partly so, but not the entire reason. Is it because Paul saw Jesus after the resurrection? Yes, but still not enough. Is it because of the 500 people who saw Jesus at the same time? Partly so, but still not enough.

Why do I believe in the resurrection? Because *I have experienced the power of the resurrection*. The New Testament has this message for you: every true Christian experiences the power of the resurrection. How do you account for the fact that thousands of Christians in China are willing to endure hard labor for twenty years, thirty years, or until they die—for the sake of Christ? I personally know some such people. They just need to give up this business called Christianity, and the door to freedom will swing open for them. The

persecutor asks them: “Did I get you right? Are you really going to lay down your life for this nonsense?” Yes they will!

My wife Helen and I visited Hungary recently, and there we met Christians of outstanding faithfulness. Neither jail nor torture nor execution behind the Iron Curtain could stop them from standing firm to the end. I met the Hungarian pentathlon athlete Andras Balczó, five-time world champion, three-time Olympic gold medalist, who threw everything away for the sake of Christ. After winning a gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics, he went on Hungarian radio and announced, “I believe in Jesus Christ!” The whole nation was shocked. No one gets away with that in an Iron Curtain country. The Communist Party pulled him from the top all the way down to the bottom.

Why would these men throw away the glory of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ? We don’t have to go so far afield—just consider the coworkers in our churches alone. We now have 36 full-time coworkers serving the Lord on three continents. They are all professionally trained, either as engineers, computer specialists, doctors, or food scientists. Are they so crazy as to throw away their good life in the world, renouncing all the money they could have earned? Simple arithmetic tells you how much money they could have made by pooling their earnings from their professions. Imagine how much money has been thrown away for the sake of the gospel.

A year and a half from now, we will have 50 full-time coworkers who have turned their backs to the world. Are they crazy? They are not! By the grace of God, I trust that we, whatever our weaknesses may be, are not crazy. So why are we doing all this? Because we have experienced the power of the resurrection here and now. If there is no such thing as the resurrection, all this talk about the resurrection would be pie-in-the-sky. Who wants to live for a fairy tale, much less die for a fairy tale?

You may ask, “Do I understand you correctly? Did you say you have experienced the power of the resurrection?” Yes, and Paul himself speaks about the resurrection, for example in Romans 6: we have died with Christ, we have been buried with him, *we have been raised with him*. I have been crucified with Christ and I now live in the power of the resurrection. I have had a foretaste of the power of the age to come. That is what being a true Christian is all about.

There are millions of Christians who have never experienced the power of the resurrection. I don’t know why they are even Christians at all. From the quality of their lives, you can see that they don’t really know what being a Christian is all about. They may come from a Christian background, or believe in various Christian doctrines, or have attended Sunday school, but they don’t know the power of the resurrection. We can rightly call them nominal Christians. If you are this type of Christian—and there are too many in the

churches today—I feel sorry for you. If you think you can smuggle your way into the resurrection on that day, you are going to be disappointed because only those who have truly experienced the power of the resurrection now will have any share in the future bodily resurrection.

What happens after we die?

What happens after we die? Do we become ghosts who roam about in the shadows, hoping that someone will leave a bowl of porridge on the floor? The poor ghost finds a bowl of porridge but it's a pitifully tiny bowl! What? No porridge and no orange? Poor thing! And what does he get? He gets paper money that nobody can use, paper furniture that nobody can sit on, and a paper car that no one can drive.

When we die, do we disintegrate into dust that is swept away by the wind? If so, life is not something to get excited about. You might as well slouch in front of the television and get some thrills. Live it up for a few years before you disintegrate into dust or become a shadowy figure that floats from place to place looking for a bowl of porridge. If that doesn't excite you, maybe you can be a monkey in the next life. We are told that monkeys evolved into man, but now we are reversing the evolutionary trend. And if man can turn into a monkey, what prevents him from becoming a beetle, and afterwards an amoeba? He might even vanish altogether! If

you are more hopeful, you can aspire to become something more noble—like a cow or a horse. If you want to be tall, you can hope to be a giraffe. Better yet, become another person. No thanks, I don't fancy another life in this cruel world!

But our God, the God of the resurrection, is our hope. Paul says that the eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, the things that God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor.2:9). You cannot even begin to imagine what God has prepared for those who love him.

The bad news

But there is the bad news. Why tell you the bad news? Because the Antichrist will tell you only the good news, and I don't want to be party to the Antichrist.

You don't need to be trained in logic to see that there is no resurrection without death. Death precedes resurrection. If you have not died, you cannot be raised from the dead. We must die with Christ before we can be raised with him. That's the unpalatable part that sticks into our throats. We want to hear something else: "Tell me more stories about raising the dead, like the one about the car driver who got killed—that's simply out of this world! Or the one about the guy in Florida who got killed by a 38 caliber bullet, and was brought back to life. But spare me all this talk about taking up the cross."

Let me repeat: No cross no resurrection; no death no life. That is why so many Christians today have never experienced the power of the resurrection. Have you experienced the resurrection? For nominal Christians, the resurrection is only fantasy or mythology. How can you know whether the resurrection is real or not? Experience it. How? Die. To experience spiritual resurrection, you need to die spiritually with Christ.

In my last message I showed that the Antichrist knows the importance of the resurrection. That is why he will try to duplicate it, as we see in Revelation 13. There we read that the Antichrist will give the appearance—and only an appearance—of having died, and then he will seemingly rise from the dead. That creates a big problem. You look at the Antichrist who seems to have been raised from the dead, and you look at the historical Christ who was raised from the dead, and then you begin to wonder which one is the real Christ. Dear friends, this brings us to the heart of the matter. It is a matter of life and death to be able to distinguish between the true and the false. While you are listening to my preaching now, can you tell whether I am speaking the truth or not?

Misconceptions about the word “Antichrist”

The word “antichrist” itself is misleading in Chinese and in English. It is usually rendered in Chinese as 敌基督 (1 John 2:18), which literally means an enemy of Christ. As we will see, this is a distortion of the Greek word *anti*. A similar confusion arises in English because the English prefix “anti” has a different meaning from the Greek prefix *anti*. In English, when we speak of an anti-aircraft missile, we mean a missile that destroys aircraft. The missile is anti-aircraft because it opposes and destroys aircraft. Carrying this logic over, many have assumed that the Antichrist is simply the one who openly opposes the Christ, or attempts to “shoot down” the Christ. If this is how you understand the meaning of “antichrist,” then you do not quite understand the magnitude of the problem.

Look up the word *anti* in any Greek dictionary, and you will discover that it does not mean “against” or “opposed to”. On the contrary, it means “replacement of” (see the Appendix at the end of this book for details). Hence, the Antichrist is not a counter Christ but a *counterfeit Christ* or a *replacement Christ*. He will appear before the world not as a self-proclaimed enemy of Christ, but as the real Christ himself.

The word *anti* in New Testament Greek also has the meaning “on behalf of”. This sense is found, for example, in the statement that the Son of Man came to “give his life as a

ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28). Here the word “for” translates the Greek word *anti*. In other words, Christ died *anti* our sins. He died for our sins, not against our sins. He died on our behalf, not in opposition to us. This gives us an indication of how the Antichrist will pretend to come *on behalf of Christ*, that is, in the name of Christ, and as the Christ.

The misconceptions about “anti” and therefore “Anti-christ” have led to the wrong notion that the Antichrist will be easy to identify, being simply the one who openly wages war against Christ. That is a wrong understanding of the situation. The Antichrist will appear before the world not as one who openly opposes Christ but as the real Christ himself. When he appears to the world in his deception, there will be great confusion over whether he is the Christ or not.

There is a similar confusion in the churches today over who is speaking the truth. If you are a non-Christian, you must be confused by so many claims and counterclaims. But thanks be to God, there *is* a way to know who is speaking the truth and who is speaking falsehood. We will come to that at the conclusion of this message.

The spirit of the Antichrist: You will be like God

The word “antichrist” occurs four times in Scripture, and only in 1 John and 2 John.¹ The spirit of the Antichrist is *already* in the world (1 John 4:3). In fact, it has been in the world for a very long time, *even from the Garden of Eden*. When Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he said to them (to paraphrase): “Did God really say you must not eat of the tree of knowledge? Don’t believe that, for on the day you eat of it, you will become like God. Although you were created in his image, you are not completely like him yet because you don’t have his knowledge. He is omniscient and knows everything. Just eat of the tree, and you will become 100% like God. All it takes is one small bite!”

How tempting and how attractive! If you become like God, you would never have to die, or live in poverty, or wash your clothes. As Eve was fixing her eyes on the forbidden fruit, she succumbed to the temptation.

There is nothing mysterious about the Antichrist or the spirit of the Antichrist. In preaching about the Antichrist, I am talking about the whole of human history from Adam to the end. It is the story of a long succession of antichrists until the final Antichrist who will be the logical conclusion of what had started in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate of the

¹ 1 John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7

fruit because they wanted to be like God by being his equal or even, finally, taking his place.

All along the spirit of the Antichrist has been telling us that we can become like God. The Antichrist will establish himself in the temple and proclaim himself God (2 Thess.2:4). Man's hour has finally arrived, fulfilling his ambition of reaching the heights of godhood, an ambition he has been pursuing all through history.

Adam failed in the Garden of Eden, so we think we are smarter than this ancient fellow. We live in the high-tech age, but Adam wouldn't even know how to press the buttons of an electronics gadget. We are sophisticated high-tech creatures who have the potential to become like God.

We are close to being gods—at least we think so. Look at our high technology. The other day I was taking a pleasant stroll on the walkway that encircles our apartment block, breathing in this so-called fresh air, a rare and precious commodity in Hong Kong. I suddenly noticed that someone was watching me with a television camera. I continued walking around the block, and saw another camera. I soon discovered that there was a camera at every key location on the walkway.

Wonderful! Man has almost reached the heights of God. Man can be everywhere and see everything. He can sit comfortably in his control station and monitor my every step. He wants to be like the omniscient God, because knowledge is

the key to omnipresence. Look at this marvelous satellite technology. From outer space you can look down towards earth and take a photograph of any house that happens to interest you. The United States can monitor what is going on in Russia on every street. They knew about Chernobyl before the Russians spoke a word about it. And the Russians are into this game too, monitoring what is happening in the United States.

We try to be like God through technology. A laptop computer today is more powerful than a computer that fifty years ago filled a whole room. We have super computers. We went from the atom bomb to the hydrogen bomb. What is there we cannot do? We are getting so powerful that we may blow ourselves apart. Attaining godhood is getting to be a dangerous affair!

The Antichrist will preach a message that will be music to your ears, a message about becoming like gods. Most of you are too young to remember Hitler except through history books. But to some of us, Hitler lived not very long ago. Wasn't he an impressive figure? We can still watch newsreels of Hitler standing on a platform in a large stadium, shouting "Heil!" to the multitudes. He had style! Lesser gods do things one way, but the top god does things his own way. Everyone there worshipped and adored Hitler as the savior and redeemer of Germany.

Hitler was a prototype of the coming Antichrist. Although he was but one of many antichrists, he was quite a remarkable exemplar. He preached an irresistible message about being supermen. Most Germans loved it. It was music to their ears. "That's what I like to hear! I was a nobody until I found out I am a superman! Of course Hitler is the superman of supermen, but that still makes me a superman. Together we will build a virtually eternal thousand-year Reich!" This bolstering of the ego, this exaltation of man to the place of God, is the message of the Antichrist.

The message of the cross

Man has been striving to become like God, but the message of the cross goes the opposite way. That is why the message of the cross is unpopular today. Was Christ born in a palace? No he was not. Was he born in a village? No, not even in a village. Where then was he born? In a manger. A manger is not the beautiful little cot depicted in the Nativity, but a dirty trough for animal fodder. He went further down, even to death on the cross. He died not as a glorious freedom fighter or a decorated hero of mankind but as a common criminal.

For a long time man has been trying to change the message of the cross into something palatable. So it was made into a beautiful cross, gold-plated and adorned with gems, that

we wear around our necks. You may call me a spoil-sport, but there is absolutely nothing glamorous about the cross.

We will not experience the resurrection unless we go right down, even to death on the cross. That is the message that many don't want to hear. I don't expect them to like the message just as the Antichrist knows they won't like it. The message of the cross is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews (1 Cor.1:23). Nobody likes this message, but it is one that I will preach because it is one that the Antichrist will not preach.

Are you trying to go up and up like the tower of Babel that got nowhere? Or do you want to go down and down, and be lifted up into a new life by the resurrection power here and now? That is a choice you must make.

Many do not like the message of the cross. Some have objected to our message, saying that it is difficult and preoccupied with this never-ending talk about taking up the cross and following Jesus, unlike the preaching in some other churches. But it is through the cross that you are going to experience the power of the resurrection.

It is the message of the cross by which you can discern who is speaking falsehood and who is speaking the truth. Just as Hitler never preached the cross, so the Antichrist will never preach the cross. Are you willing to listen to the message of truth?

Chapter 3

How to Discern The False Christ?

In this third message on the Antichrist, I will summarize the previous message, then deal with one or two technical points to explain the biblical foundation of my messages.

I started this series on the Antichrist at an elementary level. But as the messages proceed, we will have to go deeper. I will, however, speak in such a way that you will be able to understand the messages even if you are a non-Christian or you lack a strong biblical foundation. Occasionally I have to explain the biblical foundation of what I preach because these messages are recorded and sent to various parts of the world. Among those who receive them, some have had Bible training and even advanced Bible training. It is only fair to them that they know the biblical basis of my messages.

Do you have the Spirit of God or the spirit of Antichrist?

There are only two kinds of people in the world. Everyone in this meeting hall, as well as everyone outside, belongs to one of these categories. The one category consists of those who have the Holy Spirit; the other category consists of those who do not have the Holy Spirit. Which category do you belong to? Do you have the Holy Spirit or not? Some people are in the sad position of not knowing whether they have the Holy Spirit of God. Worse yet, some are self-deceived, thinking they have the Holy Spirit when they do not.

The two categories can also be delineated in this way: you have either the Spirit of God or the spirit of Antichrist, with no middle ground between them. Therefore, if you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are *living under the spirit of Antichrist*. That is why these messages on the Antichrist apply to every person, for good or for bad.

Part One:

Summary of the Last Message

Why is the cross important?

Let us summarize our last message on the cross and the Antichrist. The cross is important for our study on the Antichrist because the cross is the only means of discerning who the Antichrist is. The Antichrist will not come into the global scene looking like a devil with two horns and long fangs, such that every time he smiles, we shout: “Look! There’s the Antichrist!” No, I would imagine that the Antichrist will be strikingly handsome and have a refined taste in clothes. I imagine that he will be very intelligent and that, above all things (and this is where the problem lies), he will be very religious. Worse yet, he will be a religious leader. That will make things very complicated. Will you be able to discern the Antichrist when he appears? He will be charismatic, capable, and full of charm and grace—not God’s grace but human grace and graciousness. Anyone who has the power to lead and mislead the world will certainly have these qualities.

What does “anti” mean?

Last time I explained that the word *anti* in Greek does not mean “opposed to” as it does in English. On the contrary, it means a substitute or a replacement. Therefore the Antichrist will be a replacement Christ or a pretender Christ.

Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* gives three definitions of *anti*, none of which has the meaning of opposition: “*Anti* does not have the sense ‘over against’ in the New Testament but is used for (a) ‘in place of,’ (b) ‘on behalf of,’ and (c) ‘for the sake of.’” Arndt and Gingrich’s lexicon (2nd edition) gives three similar definitions of *anti*: “instead of,” “in place of,” and “in behalf of.” See the Appendix at the end of this book.

When we understand the meaning of *anti* correctly, we can see that the Antichrist will not be opposed to Christ publicly. Certainly he will be opposed to Christ in what he does, but only in a hidden, secret way. He will conceal his opposition because his intention is to deceive, and especially to deceive the *elect* (a biblical term for true Christians). If you are one of the elect, the Antichrist’s objective will be, first and foremost, to deceive you. He will be too clever and subtle to start off with outright persecution. But if he cannot deceive you, only then will he start his terrible campaign of persecution against you. The Lord warns us that even the elect will

be deceived. To complicate matters, the Antichrist will pretend to be the Christ, the long-awaited Savior.

The Messianic expectation in present-day Israel

Many people in the world today are looking for the coming of the Messiah (the Jewish term for the Savior King of Israel). Among the Jews in Israel, the messianic expectation is very strong and will intensify as the political pressure on Israel becomes greater and greater. The pressure is already intense. Israel, with a population of six million [in 1987], is surrounded by four or five hundred million enemies.² In military terms, it is precarious to be outnumbered one hundred to one. The Jews have no illusions about their situation. Israel is so small that you can drive from east to west in 45 minutes. A military tank would take less than two hours to cover the distance, and a jet fighter about one minute at full operational speed.

Can you imagine that? Every city and airbase in Israel is within one minute's strike once an enemy fighter-bomber enters Israeli airspace. That hardly gives the Israeli jets enough time to scramble into the air to engage the enemy aircraft especially if radar fails to detect the approach of such

² This discussion about Israel's military situation reflects that of 1987, the year in which this sermon was preached.

aircraft or if hostile intent is not evident. That is why Israeli pilots are on the alert 24 hours a day. Their survival is at stake. Having two hours to meet an oncoming tank is not too great a problem. But how do you deal with a fighter-bomber which can be on the scene in one minute, dropping bombs all over your cities and airports? Now we can see why the Israeli pilots are the most skillful and best trained in the world. The survival of the nation is at stake. We probably cannot even begin to understand the magnitude of the tension that exists in Israel today.

But the Israelis know that even this is not enough. Israel is organized such that within minutes of hearing a secret message on the radio, the soldiers will be deployed at their battle stations. No one else knows the secret message, but the infantry, artillery and tank units all know what that signal is, and they will respond immediately. Survival depends on immediate action; a delay of five minutes may be too late. In Israel it is not uncommon to see people walking around with guns strapped over their shoulders. Everyone stands ready but they also know that this is not enough. In military terms, a four-to-one superiority is more than enough to attack an enemy. A hundred-to-one superiority absolutely boggles the mind. It is a question of survival. Now you can understand why Israel is looking for the Messiah, the Savior King. And that gives the deceiver a chance to do his work.

Another example: Germany before WW War II

The most ideal condition for the deceiver to carry out his work is when people are looking for a savior. Germany before World War II was in this kind of situation. Germany was desperately looking for a savior to rescue her from economic disaster and to erase the memories of her defeat in World War I. And that gave Hitler his opportunity.

Hitler, a prototype of the Antichrist, was charismatic, dynamic, intelligent, and endowed with a perfect grasp of human psychology. Whenever he got up to speak before a crowd, he would stand there with his nose in the air as if sniffing something. Was he sniffing the fragrance of spring or autumn? No, he was gauging the mood of the people. Being an expert in human psychology, he knew how to exploit the people's emotions; he knew exactly what they wanted to hear. If you watch Hitler's expressions in the old newsreels, you can see how skillfully he sensed the mood of the crowds. Within minutes he would have them shouting in a frenzy, "Heil! Heil! Heil!" He had the German people at his fingertips, and played with them as if playing with a puppet on a string.

The Germans are not a stupid people. They might not be the master race that Hitler convinced them they were (I think they have since gotten out of that illusion), but at least they were of reasonable intelligence. Yet Hitler knew how to

control them; he knew how to pull the right strings to get them into a frenzy and shouting, *Heil!* He told them to go to Russia, to France, to Scandinavia—and die. Sure enough, they went forth and died. I once asked a German friend of mine to explain this phenomenon to me. How could one man deceive a whole nation? But he said to me, “If you don’t mind, I’d rather not talk about it. It hurts too much.”

For the German people, deception meant death by the millions. I read the account of the battle of Stalingrad where the Germans were finally stopped on the eastern front. They thought they will have an easy victory; that they will wipe out the Russian defenses; that the Soviet Union will be at the mercy of the Nazis.

But the Russians put up a fight, and dug deep in Stalingrad. They were determined to make the Germans pay with their lives for every lamp post, every tree, and every door they destroyed. I feel sorry not just for the Russians but also for the young Germans who had been deceived. As the battle wore on, the harsh Russian winter came upon the German soldiers who were still fighting in their summer uniforms. Those acquainted with the Canadian winter could well imagine the terrible conditions that befell the German soldiers. At -20 degrees Fahrenheit, the German soldiers were shivering so much that they could hardly pull the triggers of their guns. But they still went forth and died. Finally the German soldiers surrendered at Stalingrad. They were starved and frozen,

surrounded by Russian soldiers wrapped in warm battle garments and gloves and fur hats.

It is incredible how the Germans were deceived into thinking that they were doing something worthwhile. Yet the Antichrist will be a greater deceiver than Hitler ever was. I want to show you just how dangerous the Antichrist will be. He is dangerous not because of any demonic appearance with horns and fangs, but because he is a master of deception. The main point of this message is how to prevent ourselves from being deceived. I hope that you will not be found among the deceived. Your eternal welfare is at stake.

Soon the whole world will be looking for a Savior

The coming of the Antichrist might not be far away. As I said, the Jews today are looking for the coming of the Messiah and Savior King. *And so are the Christians!* The world situation will deteriorate more and more until it is similar to the situation in Germany just before World War II. Then the world will be looking for a political savior. Many of you are old enough to remember what happened in China after World War II. China was bankrupt and torn by civil strife, and that gave an opportunity for ambitious military and political leaders to take over the country. The day is coming when a similar situation will prevail in the world. Then the Antichrist

will appear as a world leader in the spirit of Antichrist and the power of Satan. That will give him an advantage that no other political leader has ever had. Indeed, the spirit of the Antichrist is already now at work in the world with great power.

The Antichrist will be a counterfeit Christ

Before I conclude the first part of the message, let me present a few more facts to establish what I have just said, namely, that the Antichrist will not be publicly and openly opposed to Christ. On the contrary, he will be a pretender Christ.

For the purpose of analysis, we distinguish between what we call a *contra* Christ (*contra* is a Latin word meaning “opposed to”) and what we call a *pseudo* Christ (that is, a false Christ or a pretender Christ). Now, the Antichrist is a *contra* Christ insofar as he opposes Christ, but he is a *pseudo* Christ in the way he works. Let me present the evidence.

As we have seen, the Greek word *anti* does not have the meaning of opposition. On the contrary, it means “in place of,” “for the sake of,” “as a substitute for.” This we see in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 where it is said that Christ gave his life as “a ransom for many” (Greek, *lytron anti pollōn*). Here *anti* expresses the idea that Jesus is our substitute and acting on our behalf.

Even in compound form, *anti* does not necessarily carry the meaning of opposition. In 1 Timothy 2:6 (“gave himself as a ransom for all”), the compound *antilytron* expresses the idea of Christ being a ransom for us—as our substitute and in place of us. In Luke 14:12, *antikaleō* does not mean “to call against” but “to invite in return.” *Antimisthia* (e.g. Romans 1:27) means a recompense, either good or bad, depending on the deeds that are being judged. These examples show that *anti*, even in compound form, does not necessarily carry the idea of “against.” But there are other compounds which do carry the meaning of “against”. For instance, *antikeimai* means “opposed to” (Lk.13:17); *antidikos* means an opponent (Mt.5:25); and *antilegō* means “to speak against” (Lk.2:34).

Therefore *anti* can have two meanings. It can mean “as a substitute for” (primary meaning) but it can also mean “in opposition to” (secondary meaning). It is important to understand the one in relation to the other: The Antichrist is a *substitute* Christ, but he is also an *enemy* of Christ by his hostile actions in which he tries to replace Christ by pretending to be the real Christ.

Can you discern who is speaking the truth?

When we are confronted with two persons who both claim to be the Christ, our problem would be to tell which is the real

Christ, and which is the false one. Or if a person claims to be Christ, whether or not he is actually Christ. Discernment is important not only for the future, but also at present. Can you tell whether what I am saying is true or false? The problem is that most of you do not have enough biblical training to tell whether I am speaking the truth or not. As I said, the Antichrist himself will be a religious leader with religious training. But you do not have the Bible training or Bible knowledge to discern whether he is speaking the truth. Your problem, even today, is that you don't know whether any church leader is speaking the truth. You lack the means to know, having neither the equipment nor the training. If a religious leader says such and such, and if I ask you to catch anything in his message that is contrary to Scripture, can you? You might not have the training to discern his teaching. In our churches, we have this exercise as part of our training: After quoting a writer or speaker, those in training would be asked if they can find anything wrong with the teaching. Of course, my indicating that there might be something wrong is already a big hint. But if no one had given you a hint, you would have no way of discerning whether the teaching is true or false. Let us now deal with this problem in the remainder of this message.

Part Two:

How Can We Discern the Truth?

The example of the coin

We come now to the second part of this very important message. How do we discern the truth? Here I have a coin in my hand. For those sitting at the back, it may be hard to see. It looks like an ordinary coin but it is no ordinary coin. On one side is the head of Alexander the Great. If genuine, this coin would be over 2,300 years old. Imagine, I am holding a coin that dates from before the time of Jesus. Few of us can even appreciate the length of 2,300 years. If the coin is genuine, its value is very significant, well beyond the US\$20 I paid for it. If it is not genuine, I stand to lose US\$20.

I bought the coin last year when I was on the Mount of Olives with my wife Helen. While we were looking at the city of Jerusalem, an Arab man came up to me and asked, "Would you like to buy a coin? Look! Alexander the Great!" I examined the coin and sure enough written on the back was the word "Alexander" in ancient Greek. Part of the letter "A" had been worn away with time, but the remaining portion "lexander" was still there. After examining it carefully, I

asked him how much he wanted for it. He started with a sky-high price but I finally brought it down to US\$20. If it is genuine it may be worth thousands of dollars; if not, it isn't worth much, maybe a few dollars for the silver.

Now, in this case it does not really matter much, does it? If it is fake, I stand to lose a small sum of money. But with the subject we are talking about today, it matters beyond everything else, because we stand to lose our lives, indeed our eternal lives.

Distinguishing the true from the false: A daily problem

Today we are constantly faced with the problem of what is genuine and what is not. If you give a U.S. bank note to a moneychanger in Hong Kong, he would take out a strange looking instrument and run it over the money. If you ask him what he is doing, he would say, "Don't worry, I'm not destroying your money. I'm just checking whether it is genuine or not." The instrument emits a certain sound if the note is genuine, and a different sound if it is counterfeit. This neat little instrument can tell you whether your bank note is genuine. How convenient! If only we could do that with teaching! If only we had an instrument that could scan a teaching and tell us whether it is true or false.

How can we discern the truth when there is so much false teaching today? If you talk to a non-Christian about the gospel, he would say, "But whom should I believe? There are Catholics and there are Protestants. Among the Protestants there are the Baptists, the Methodists, and many other denominations. What about the non-Christian religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and so on?" In a world where a thousand voices are clamoring for your attention, how do you tell who is speaking the truth? If you think the situation is confusing now, let me tell you that it will be even more difficult as time goes on. It has become so difficult that even the experts have a hard time distinguishing the true from the false.

If I take this coin to a numismatist (a coin expert), he would have a hard time telling whether it is genuine or not because forgeries are so good nowadays. I showed it to some of my archaeologist friends who have lived in Israel for many years. They examined the coin but couldn't tell whether it's genuine or not. I said to them: "You can't tell? But you are archaeologists; this is your department." But they told me that forgeries are so good nowadays that it is almost impossible to tell.

Where does that leave us? Like I said, some things don't matter, but other things matter a lot. The Antichrist is going to be like a twin to the Christ. You look at this one and you

look at that one, and you say, “Hey! Which one is the real one?”

I returned to Israel recently, and went to St. Andrew’s Hospice where I used to stay when I was studying at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Recognizing a man I knew from before, I said, “Hello John, how are you?” He looked at me and blinked.

“I’m not John.”

“Surely you’re John!”

“No, I’m Paul.”

“But weren’t you here the last time I stayed in this hospice?”

“No.”

“Yes you were!”

“No. That was my brother.”

“Your brother? Your brother is called John?”

“That’s right!”

“Then you’re identical twins?”

“That’s right!”

They were identical in so many ways, even in the way they combed their hair. I could not believe my eyes. The only thing that gave him away was that he didn’t recognize me. If I show

you a photo of these two brothers, you wouldn't be able to tell any difference between them. So I said to him, "It must have been very convenient in school. If you weren't prepared for an exam, your brother could take it for you!" Their teachers could not tell them apart even after many years. There was no distinguishing mark to tell them apart: they were of the same height, had the same hairstyle, and were identical in almost every respect.

Which is more dangerous, the anti-Christian or the false Christian?

We are faced with a serious problem. That is why I asked this question: Which is more dangerous, an Antichrist who is openly opposed to Christ, or an Antichrist who is so similar to Christ that you can't tell the difference? I think the answer is obvious. A related question is this: Which is more dangerous, the anti-Christian or the false Christian? Obviously the false Christian is far more dangerous than the anti-Christian.

The church throughout its history has never been in danger of being destroyed by the anti-Christians no matter how brutally they persecuted the church. Persecution has always been good for the church. Look at what happened in China. When the Communists came into power, China had

an estimated 1.2 million Christians. The Communists were anti-Christians; they were hostile to Christians and drove out the missionaries. But thanks to the Communists, we now have more than 30 million Christians in China. Going from 1.2 to 30 million Christians was not something that even the missionaries could accomplish, yet it was accomplished during Communist rule without a single missionary. The anti-Christians have always been good for the church. Yes, they persecute the church but they also purify it and strengthen it.

But the greatest danger to the church has always been the false Christians or pseudo Christians. I have constantly preached against false Christians in the western world. In so doing, I have made many enemies, and I will continue to make enemies. I will make sure that the false Christians become clearly identifiable because they are so hard to identify. In many places including England and Wales, I have preached against false Christians in such a way that I will never be invited back. They will either love the truth, or find the message so offensive that they will never invite me back. I do this because false Christians are the greatest danger to the church.

Many years ago, I didn't want to become a Christian myself. Was it because of the anti-Christians? No! I thank God for the anti-Christians. It was because of them that I became a Christian. In this sense I thank God for the Communists

because if they had not taken over China, I would not be a Christian today. The Communists purged the church so thoroughly of phony Christians that I finally saw the real ones. Before that, whenever I went to church, I would be so disgusted with Christians there that I didn't want to become one myself. But when the Communists came, they purged the church of phony Christians. And what was left? The real thing. When I saw the real Christians, I said to myself: "They are the real thing. That's what I would like to be!" You see, anti-Christians have done us a great service, but phony Christians destroy us. Many non-Christians have said, "I don't want to become a Christian. This Christian in my office is absolutely repulsive!" How many people have you met who have been put off by phony Christians?

Distinguishing mark of the Antichrist: he exalts himself

Related to the matter of true and false Christians is a wider question: Is there some way to tell the true from the false? Do we need to become Bible experts before we can discern anything? Thanks be to God, the answer is no! It certainly helps to be well trained in the Bible, but we are not at the mercy of having to receive five or ten years of Bible training before we can tell the true from the false. The merciful God

has provided more than one way to tell, but it starts with you. You must allow God to change your life through the cross before you can distinguish the true from the false. In other words, discernment is not a matter of academic knowledge but whether you have God's life in you, whether you are a new creation, whether the cross has been implemented in your life.

I will make it simple and intelligible. What is the mark of the Antichrist? 2 Thessalonians 2:4 sums it up in two words: he *exalts himself*. Self-exaltation is the exact opposite of the cross. Jesus never exalted himself; he humbled himself even to death on the cross. But the natural man, like the Antichrist, exalts himself. That is the key to discerning the true from the false. It is just as reliable as that instrument that verifies American bank notes. I put this mark of the Antichrist as simply as that, without going into the technical details.

Before talking about the Antichrist, start with yourself, and look at your own character and temperament. Do you like to be exalted? That is precisely where you can tell whether the cross is in your own life or not. Every natural man, whether Muslim or Buddhist or so-called Christian, likes to exalt himself. It doesn't matter whether he is a Protestant or a Catholic; it doesn't matter whether he is a Baptist or a Presbyterian—we are not interested in any of this. It doesn't matter what his denomination is because you can discern his

inner character by examining his life to see whether he exalts himself or not. With the same simple test, you can discern whether the cross is in your own life or not. Do you exalt yourself, or do you seek to go down to the depths of the cross?

I say categorically without fear of contradiction that *every natural man likes to be exalted*. Why do we study so hard to get good grades and a university degree? To make a good living, isn't it? Why do you want to earn lots of money? To gain respect and exalt yourself, isn't it? Let's be honest. What motivates a man to work so hard? To exalt himself. He may say, "I just want to make a living." But rebuke him and see how offended he gets. "How dare you talk to me like that! Do you know how many degrees I have, and from which universities? Do you know what my profession is?" His true colors will show. We have an *infallible* mark—I dare say *infallible*—of whether the cross is in a person's life or not. It is that easy to tell.

Take for example the school teacher who demands respect from the students. "Do you know who I am? The teacher! Behave yourself or I will have you duly caned!" If you ask him whether he is being proud, he would say, "No! This is the education system, and you've got to teach young people to behave themselves." We always have good reasons for exalting ourselves. Sometimes the explanation is valid,

sometimes not. But you know in your own heart whether you like to be exalted or not.

The Antichrist exalts himself and that is how we can identify him. Look through the Bible and you will see that Jesus *never* exalted himself. It was always God the Father who exalted him; it was the Father who gave him the “name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). Jesus himself would always go down, but it was God the Father who raised him up. God raises up those who put themselves down. That is an important biblical principle; that is the meaning of the cross. I want to speak to you in plain language lest I make it so technical that you don’t understand what I am saying. Look at your own life every day, look at the way you behave and how you relate to your friends and colleagues.

A painful example

Before I close, I want to give an example so that everyone may understand this message. This case is very painful to my own heart. Every time I think about it, it hurts me very much because I truly love this person up to this day. He was a co-worker of mine, a very capable person, and someone whom I love very much. But the way he did things and the way he treated people revealed to me that he was not suitable for full-time service even though he had been in full-time service for several years.

I spent many sleepless nights agonizing over this. One day I spoke to him face to face. Out of the deep love in my heart for him, I said to him: "I have to tell you the truth. You are not suitable for full-time service. You should withdraw and return to civilian life because you are causing too much damage to the church and to yourself. For your own good and for the well-being of the church, return to your profession. Maybe one day in the future the Lord will permit you to return to full-time service. But now is not the right time." I had to dismiss him.

He was silent for a moment. Then he said to me: "You know, there was a time when I would have laid down my life for you." He was expressing his disappointment with my decision, and was implying that he would no longer lay down his life for me as he would in the past. When I heard these words, I thanked God in my heart. It lifted the grief in my heart because it confirmed to me that he shouldn't be in the Lord's work. That is because he loved me as his idol and hero. He entered full-time service because he wanted to follow me.

Brothers and sisters, I put it on record that if any man loves me *because* he loves Jesus, I find that acceptable. But if any man loves me *instead* of loving Jesus, I will not accept that. I put it on record that I will not take for myself even one beam of the glory of Christ. God forbid! I only want to stand in the shadow of my Lord so that the glory may be his alone. I will

not allow anyone, not even out of his good intentions, to make me an antichrist.

Now you can understand the definition of “Antichrist” as a “substitute Christ,” as somebody who takes the place of Christ. This brother was following the wrong person; he was following me instead of the Lord Jesus. When he said to me, “I would have died for you,” I knew that my decision to dismiss him was the right one. He ought to return to civilian work, and he has remained in civilian work to this day. I will not have anyone serve the Lord who, intentionally or unintentionally, makes me an antichrist or a substitute Christ by loving me instead of Christ.

I warn all my coworkers from the depths of my heart: If anyone does the same thing, he cannot be my coworker because that would make me an antichrist, a substitute Christ. Looking back, I can now understand why this person was not used by the Lord, and why he had caused so much damage in the church. It was precisely because I was his idol and substitute Christ. No wonder God could not bless him or work through him. I still love this dear brother deeply. I pray that from now on, he will follow only Jesus. I hope that one day he will return to the Lord’s work.

Let it stand on record that I don’t want to be exalted. I only want the privilege of being the least among the servants of my God and king. Let no one make an antichrist out of me, for

that is to condemn himself and to condemn me as well. Let that be clearly understood.

But if I were unregenerate and functioned in the spirit of the Antichrist, I would seek glory and exaltation from man. The fact that I refuse to receive glory from man is something that I don't even understand myself. How has God so captured my heart with his love that I don't want anyone to give me the devotion which belongs to him? That is the mark of the cross which he has implanted in my heart. It is not something we can do in ourselves. We cannot change ourselves into this kind of person. That is why I say it is an infallible mark. It is by the work of the Spirit in your heart that you don't care whether people glorify you or not.

I once stood at the height of glory among the Chinese churches in Canada. I was honored everywhere I went: "Oh, that great man has arrived!" At a large Christian conference in western Canada, the organizer kept on saying to me: "What a great privilege and honor to have you speak at our conference!" My heart sank when I heard these words. Why? Because the Lord Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). So I asked the Lord, "What have I done wrong to receive this worldly honor?" Even before going to the conference, I had already told the First Training Team that something had gone wrong: "Why is everybody praising me? I have turned my back on the world; I have

taken up the cross; I have followed my Lord through shame and suffering. And what do I get? Nothing but praise and honor! What have I done wrong? Have I somehow compromised on the truth?”

But thanks be to God, as soon as I contended for God’s truth, I made many enemies. And I will continue to make more enemies, not because I want to make enemies, but because the truth will always be opposed. Now my name is known throughout the Chinese churches for better or for worse—and mostly for worse! I thank God that my name is now detested. This I say with absolutely no pretense.

Are you afraid to speak the truth? Do you stand up for the truth at your school or office, and among your classmates or colleagues? Does your life shine in the open, or have you been a silent Christian for many years? If you are even afraid to profess that you are a Christian, you are an absolute disgrace to the gospel. You are just one more phony Christian among multitudes of phony Christians.

Are you willing to accept correction?

Let us come to the last point. Do we accept correction or do we reject it? Why do people reject correction? Because correction humbles us. Rebuke, reproof, discipline—all these humble us. Those of you who have been disciplined in this church, I beg of you to understand that you are privileged. Of

course, if you have never been disciplined, you can also thank God for that as well. But if you have been disciplined, you are indeed privileged because it is helping you to place the mark of the cross into your heart, and to destroy self and pride. Proverbs is full of warnings about people who reject correction; it says that the wise man delights in correction, but the fool rejects it (cf. Proverbs 9:7–9). That is because fools like to exalt themselves, and are offended when you point out their faults.

Have you ever tried correcting your children? You are always “unfair”. I have yet to discover “fair” parents. My daughter will testify that she used to think that I was “unfair” most of the time. Children always find ways to justify themselves. “Why are you so severe with me? If only you knew the facts, you wouldn’t be so hard on me.” It is only when the children have grown up that they might realize their parents were right after all. But at the moment of discipline, parents are always unfair, scolding us when we don’t deserve to be scolded.

The church leaders are also “unfair”. Have you ever seen a reasonable church leader? What kind of a church is this whose leaders are so unreasonable? If this is how you think, you do not have the cross in your heart.

What about your roommates? They are always unreasonable and critical, aren’t they? You are always the innocent

victim who is accused of being inconsiderate. How do you accept their remarks? And what about your boss? He is always unreasonable, isn't he? The world has yet to see a reasonable boss!

Do you accept correction and rebuke? This will tell whether the mark of the cross is in your life or not.

Apostle Peter: A man with the cross in his heart

The apostle Peter said something wrong to the Lord Jesus, and the Lord gave him such a crushing rebuke ("crushing" is probably the right word) that I marvel how Peter could take it. I have thought about the incident again and again, and I wonder how I would take it if the Lord had said the same thing to me. It all started when Jesus told his disciples that he must die on the cross, but Peter said to him out of a human love: "Lord, don't do such a thing, don't go to the cross." I am trying to picture this incident recorded in Matthew 16:21f. I am trying to imagine the grief of the Lord Jesus when he looked at Peter and said to him: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me because you are concerned with the interests of man, not the things of God!"

We are so familiar with these words that we no longer appreciate their crushing force. Peter must have been totally stunned by the quiet but powerful rebuke. He could have stood up and said, "That's it! I am through! I have given up

everything, even my profession, to follow you. I have suffered shame and disgrace in following you. It was out of love that I tried to prevent you from suffering, but you had the nerve to say, 'Get behind me, Satan!' Well, that's it!"

But Peter didn't say that. The cross was in his heart in a way that is beyond my understanding. No wonder he is the chief of the apostles. I am filled with spiritual admiration for Peter. There were many other disciples who quit over a milder rebuke. This we see in John 6:66 (notice the interesting number 666, the number of the Antichrist), a verse that tells us that some disciples turned away from Jesus because they could not accept what he said, and stopped following him. The mark of the cross was not in their hearts. They could not stand the truth. Can you stand the truth?

Here then is the mark of the cross: the willingness to be humble rather than self-exalting. It is seen in such commitment to the truth that we accept what it takes to be humble: to be disciplined when we are wrong, and to refuse glory from men when we are right. If you have the mark of the cross in your life, I guarantee you that the Antichrist *will not* be able to deceive you. You will have such clarity of spiritual perception that you can discern him immediately: "Yes, he is a religious leader and a good preacher. Yes, he is good looking and very capable. *But he is false!*" You will have the spiritual perception to see this even if you lack formal Bible

training. The cross is the means to distinguish the true from the false, and the Spirit of God from the spirit of Antichrist. Your eternal well-being depends on it.

Chapter 4

Antichrist and The Spirit of Deception

1 John 2:18–23; 4:1–3; 2 John 7

We come to our fourth message on this dreadful figure of the Antichrist. We will look into the Scriptures, for I hope that you did not come here to listen to my ideas but to listen to the word of God.

The spirit of Antichrist in the church

The subject of the Antichrist is a very practical one because the spirit of Antichrist is already at work in the churches today. I hope that the spirit of Antichrist is not working in the life of anyone here. Of this we cannot be sure, but I earnestly pray that the spirit of Antichrist is not working in your heart; because if it is, you will not have any share in eternal life, not even if you call yourself a Christian, not even if you have been

baptized, not even if you have attended church for more years than you can remember. I would say something more: As I will show from Scripture, the Antichrist is going to be a Christian, indeed an apparently super-spiritual Christian. Throngs of antichrists and false Christians are already in the churches today. If you are not impressed by the Christians you know, they may well be Christians of the antichrist type.

The good Christian that you know, the one who is active in church, the one who sings in the choir, the one who leads Bible studies—this same Christian may turn out to be an antichrist, though not *the* Antichrist. I speak from experience as one who has worked in the church for a long time. I have known many a promising Christian who eventually turns out to be an antichrist.

The churches in Hong Kong are full of people today, as were the churches in Shanghai in my non-Christian days. In Shanghai, whenever I went to church, it would be packed with all kinds of people. Strangely enough, when the Communists came, the churches throughout Shanghai suddenly became empty. What happened to all the people who used to fill the churches every Sunday? Many, of course, were phony Christians (we knew that all along), but some were antichrists who betrayed us. I knew a sister who was an active Christian in our Shanghai church. One day she wrote us a letter which accused us of being spies and imperialists.

She who appeared to be a God-loving Christian turned out to be our accuser.

In Hong Kong everything is fine and peaceful for the churches, with nobody giving us much trouble. But one of these days, it will be very evident what kind of people are now attending these churches. It is hard to tell now, but one day we will know.

The Antichrist will exalt himself as the real Christ

In my last message, I have shown that the word “Antichrist” has two possible meanings. If *anti* is understood in the sense of opposition, “Antichrist” would mean a *contra Christ*. If *anti* is understood as a substitute (hence a pretender Christ or a replacement Christ), “Antichrist” would mean a *pseudo Christ*. We are left to choose between these two meanings.

My teaching on the subject of the Antichrist, which I have based solely on Scripture, differs from what is taught by most Bible teachers today. Most of them believe that “Antichrist” means a *contra Christ*, that is, a person who is opposed to Christ. But our analysis of the Greek word *anti* has shown that the biblical meaning of “Antichrist” is primarily that of a pseudo Christ or a replacement Christ, that is, one who will try to replace Christ. See the Appendix at the end of this book.

It is true, of course, that the one who pretends to be Christ is also an opponent of Christ in the sense that his subversive actions are hostile to the interests of Christ. In other words, it is true that a pseudo Christ is also a contra Christ. But that is true only in a *hidden* sense because his opposition to Christ will be concealed. Because of the nature of his deception, he will not speak openly against Christ until his deception has reached an advanced stage.

The spirit of Antichrist: an example

So as not to talk too vaguely, let me mention the case of Sun Myung Moon, a well-known Korean pastor whose followers in his Unification Church are often called Moonies. A few months ago, after I had preached in Montreal, a girl came up to me and invited me to attend a meeting of pastors. I said to her, "Please identify yourself. Which church do you come from?" She didn't want to identify herself, so I pressed my point: "Look, I'm not going to attend this meeting of pastors unless you kindly tell me who is sponsoring it." Eventually she admitted that she belonged to Pastor Moon's church. "Do you mean Sun Myung Moon?" Yes, she said. So I said to her, "Let me ask you a direct question: Do you or do you not believe that Sun Myung Moon is the Messiah?" She gulped. So I continued, "Well, aren't you going to answer my question?" She said she would rather not. I asked her, "Why not? Is Sun

Myung Moon the Messiah or is he not? What is your answer?" She said, "That's a difficult question to answer. I can't answer it right now." To that I replied, "Then neither can I accept your invitation."

As you may know, Sun Myung Moon began as a pastor but he eventually exalted himself as the Christ, though in a secret way. This girl was evading my question for fear of disclosing a "messianic secret" revealed only to the inner circle of the Unification Church.

The spirit of Antichrist is at work even now. Already there are people in the church who exalt themselves to the place of Christ. It is mystifying that so many people can believe in a person like Sun Myung Moon. As far as I know, he has never performed a miracle or done any mighty works. His teaching is not outstanding. How then do we account for his large following? The apostle Paul speaks of the "mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:7); Paul also speaks of a "strong delusion" that has come (v.11). Many members of the Unification Church originally came from other churches, so they were originally Christians. In this generation, multitudes of Christians are going to be deceived, and I hope you will not be among them.

Let us look into the roots of deception. What makes a person believe a lie rather than the truth? Many sane and intelligent people believe that this Korean pastor by the

name of Moon is the Messiah. If they can believe this now—and they number in the millions—obviously the world will be swept away when the great Antichrist comes. Of this the Bible warns us, as I am warning you now. What will the Antichrist teach that will attract so many people? Does the Bible provide any clues? What are the things that attract people, and what are the conditions in a person's heart that make him susceptible to deception? In the heart of man there must be something that the Antichrist can manipulate to draw people to himself.

It is not that difficult to find out what are the things that entice people. In a world in which most people have no direction in life, many are weak and gullible. It is a gullibility that is exploited by businessmen, and they even make the unflattering statement that a fool is born every minute. People become fools when they are controlled by their passions, lusts and desires.

Deception: An example

There is a Chinese proverb which says, "A foot of earth is worth an inch of gold." In conventional wisdom, it is sound to invest in land and real estate because land is a secure form of riches. Land or property tends to hold or increase its value whereas money depreciates in value over the long term.

The other day I read a newspaper report of a property transaction that took place here in Hong Kong. According to the report, a man went around looking for real estate in the New Territories after receiving a lot of advice: “Want to buy property? Invest in where the people are moving to—the New Territories! Just look at all the farmers there. They used to sweat away, growing vegetables on small plots of land, but they sold their lands and became instant millionaires. Some even own entire blocks of apartments.”

Not wanting to miss an opportunity, this man scraped together a large sum of money and went around in the New Territories looking for a plot of land where developers might build the next apartment block. He came upon a village that looked promising, and there he was greeted by a friendly agent. “Want to buy this piece of land? It’s in great demand! Fifty people have already looked at it. Since you’re such a nice guy, I’ll ignore these fifty guys and sell you this piece of land. How’s that for a deal?” The prospective buyer couldn’t believe his good fortune.

He asked to be shown the boundaries of the property, and it turned out to be a much bigger piece of land than he had imagined. “Wow! It’s big enough for a whole apartment block! I’m going to be rich!” He made an offer, and they began to work out the details, filling out one form after another. They even had a lawyer on hand to ratify the transaction. At

the crucial moment, the agent said to him: "A deposit is required, of course. A piece of land this big usually requires a big deposit. But since you look so honest, I'm only asking for a few tens of thousands." The buyer rushed home to get the cash, rushed back to the agent, and handed over the deposit, for which he got a professional-looking document with signatures and seals.

A few days later, he went back to survey his newly-acquired property. As he was happily strutting about, a farmer came along and asked him what he was doing there. He answered, "What kind of a question is that? This is my piece of land!" "Your piece of land? You must be joking!" retorted the farmer. "No I'm not! I even have the papers here to prove it." He produced the paper, but the farmer said, "It's all in your imagination because this piece of land happens to be mine!" But the man answered, "Not anymore. It was even signed by a lawyer." He pointed to the house where the lawyer was stationed but he was nowhere to be seen. Even the door sign had been taken down. This piece of paper, for which he had paid several tens of thousands of dollars, turned out to be phony. I am not inventing this story. It is a true story that appeared in the newspapers recently.

Are you greedy?

What makes a person susceptible to deception? Greed, for one thing. That is why astute businessmen say that a fool is born every minute. Have you ever looked at all your possessions and said to yourself, “Why did I buy all this junk in the first place? These things were so nice-looking when I bought them, but what am I going to do with them now?” Have you ever tried counting your pens? You have a silver one, a gold one, and an enameled one. To use your pens all at the same time, you would have to use all ten fingers. It’s the same with your clothes. You have in your wardrobe a jacket for spring, one for autumn, and one for winter. Fair enough, but what about your twenty other jackets and fifteen pairs of shoes?

Take a walk around Hong Kong and see whether you can find a block on which there are no shops. With so many shops everywhere, I wonder how they ever manage to stay in business. If they depend on people like me for their business, the owners would go bankrupt. Three pharmacies can be on the same block, or five optical shops in the same shopping center. Many people wear glasses, it is true, but surely we don’t change our glasses every month! These stores are prospering because people want to acquire more and more. If you return empty-handed from a shopping trip, you would feel that your time has been wasted, wouldn’t you?

All this may seem minor, but sooner or later, Satan is going to catch us. When we go fishing, sometimes we can sit there all day and catch nothing. But when we finally do catch something, it is because the fish wants something to eat—just as we all want to eat. Look at how many restaurants there are in Hong Kong. The other day, for the fun of it, I looked in the Yellow Pages under “Restaurants”. To my amazement, I counted forty pages of restaurants; this number does not include the noodle shops, wonton shops and street-side stalls not listed in the Yellow Pages. The restaurants in New Town Plaza, for example, are so packed that you have to queue up. The next time you go fishing, don’t laugh at the fish that goes for the squiggly worm. Our own stomachs compel us to walk into a restaurant.

Where do the antichrists come from?

The word “Antichrist” is used by only one New Testament writer and that writer is the apostle John. The word appears a few times in his first and second letters. Let us therefore turn to these letters, starting with 1 John 2:18, to gain a better understanding of the Antichrist:

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18, ESV)

This is John's reminder to the Christians that they have heard of the coming of the Antichrist. John goes on to say that even at the present time, many antichrists have arisen. The next verse tells us where these antichrists come from:

They went out from us [from us Christians, from the church], but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:17, ESV)

Shocking to say, these antichrists come from "us" — *from the church!* The Antichrist will not be an outsider or a non-Christian. On the contrary, all antichrists, including the Antichrist, will come from within the church. In other words, *the church is the breeding ground of the Antichrist.* Sickening, isn't it? Yes, even before the antichrists come out from our midst, even before they separate themselves from the church, even before they reveal their true identity, they are already in the church. That makes the whole matter disturbing and frightening.

Thank God for the genuine Christians that we find in every church. There is, I am sure, hardly a church in the world where there isn't somebody who genuinely loves the Lord. But the Lord himself talks about the tares among the wheat

(Mt.13:24–30, 36–43). The tares are in the majority because the spirit of Antichrist is already at work in every church.

The Antichrist denies that Jesus is King, Savior and Lord

Lest we are too confident of our ability to escape from the deception of the Antichrist, let us look further into the chapter, 1 John 2, in verses 22 and 23:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:22–23, ESV)

It says here that the Antichrist is going to deny that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah.³ If we are confident that we will never deny Jesus' messiahship, let us bear in mind that denial does not have to be verbal. According to Titus 1:16, some Christians deny their Lord and Master by the kind of lives they live.

Examine your own life. Are you denying Christ with the kind of life you are living? Whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian, you know very well that the church is full of

³ Christ and Messiah are equivalent titles. Christ comes from the Greek term *christos* which is equivalent to the Hebrew word for Messiah.

phony Christians and pseudo Christians whose conduct is shameful by the standards of Scripture and whose lives are a disgrace to their Lord and Master. By their lives they deny Jesus as Lord and King. They might not deny him with their lips but their lives speak louder than their words.

When the Antichrist sets himself up as the Christ, he will also deny the messiahship of Jesus. But his denial will not be verbal, at least not in the early stages of his deception; it will be very subtle and almost imperceptible. Now we can see why the Moonies want to conceal their belief in the messiahship of Sun Myung Moon. This girl who spoke to me didn't want to tell me whether Rev. Moon is the Messiah or not. If she had truly believed that he is not, she could have told me so and settled the question straightaway.

The same words may have different meanings

The Antichrist—the false messiah—is going to deny that Jesus is King and Savior and Lord, but he will still acknowledge Jesus as a great teacher and even as the Son of God. Yes, even the sects believe that Jesus is the Son of God. It all sounds very nice until you ask them what they mean by Son of God. Don't be deceived by words; you must safeguard your eternal well-being.

I feel so sorry for the average Christian today. Christians today are like sheep without a shepherd; they cannot tell who is speaking the truth and who is speaking falsehood. They do not have enough spiritual discernment and training in the word of God to tell. That is why our church provides one training after another to equip you for survival in a world where confusion reigns. If you belong to this church and you don't take the opportunity to receive the Basic Discipleship Training and the Intermediate Discipleship Training, you will have missed an opportunity that very few churches in the world offer. We are providing you with all this training so that you can discern the truth, understand the Bible, and tell what is true and what is false.

Ask a Jehovah's Witness whether Jesus is the Son of God, and he will answer, "Yes, Jesus is the Son of God." That beautiful-sounding answer may cause you to say, "Praise the Lord my brother! There is really no difference between you and me, for I also believe that Jesus is the Son of God!" Not so fast! Ask him what he means by Son of God and you may be taken aback by his definition. You see, they use the same words but the meaning is entirely different.

Another example is the resurrection. It is important to believe in the resurrection because, according to Romans 10:9, if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. If somebody tells you that he believes in the

resurrection of Jesus, ask him what he means by resurrection from the dead. If he comes from a liberal theological seminary, his definition of resurrection may surprise you. You see, the liberal theologian also believes in the resurrection, but he understands it differently from the way you understand it, or from the way the Bible teaches it (that God raised Jesus bodily from the dead). The liberal theologian also believes that Jesus is alive today, but only in some vague sense of being alive in your heart. He does not believe that Jesus was ever physically raised from the dead. The liberal theologian also uses the word “resurrection” but it carries an entirely different meaning. Complicated, isn’t it? That’s what I am warning you of.

The Antichrist denies Jesus Christ has come in the flesh

1 John 4:1–3 teaches something else about the Antichrist:

¹ Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the

antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:1–3, ESV)

The last few words confirm what we observed earlier: that the spirit of Antichrist is already in the world. A new and important element is brought out in verse 2: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” Note here the reference to the full title “Jesus Christ” rather than the shorter title “Jesus”. The full title Jesus Christ is a confession that Jesus is the Christ or the Messiah. But even this confession is not yet complete unless we confess further that this Jesus Christ has *come in the flesh*. In other words, a false teacher may acknowledge Jesus as the Christ but deny that he has come in the flesh, that is, in a physical body.

John gives us a simple test: Do you confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh? The importance of this confession is readily seen in the consequences of denying it, especially when that denial is taken to its logical conclusion. According to these false teachers, Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh but only in the spirit; therefore Jesus Christ was not a human being with flesh and blood. Here is where we see the consequences of this teaching: Since there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (Heb.9:22; Lev. 17:11), he could not have died for us. In other words, a

dehumanized Christ dispossessed of flesh and blood cannot even save us.

Although this teaching is biblically false, it sounds super-spiritual because it promotes a super holy and super pure Jesus who never got entangled with human flesh. Let me warn you that multitudes of false teachers, including the false Messiah, will teach spiritual-sounding doctrines to deceive people whose foundation in the word of God is weak. Even today, the false teachings that are current in the church all sound super-spiritual. (An example is the spiritual-sounding phrase “sovereignty of God”; here the problem lies not so much in what is said as in what is not said.)

The false teachers who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh may still acknowledge his messiahship. But that does not vindicate their teaching or make it any less false and dangerous. Do not be deceived when they say, “I fully confess Jesus as Christ, but Christ is too pure and holy to be entangled in human flesh. Haven’t you heard that without holiness no man shall see the Lord? Don’t you know that holiness is incompatible with the flesh? Christ is too holy and too pure to defile himself with degraded flesh.”

Brothers and sisters, I reject this false teaching. We see from the Bible that holiness is not true holiness unless the body itself is holy. What does Scripture say? “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you (make you holy)

completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thess. 5:23, ESV).

The Antichrist can give you the world

I am told that in northern China, donkeys are used for grinding millet. The donkey turns a heavy grinding stone as it walks round and round. This is a mystery. How can anyone make a stubborn donkey go in endless circles? Certainly not by whacking it with a stick. I have seen how stubborn a donkey can be. You can whack it repeatedly and it will only flap its ears. If you whack it once too often, it will jump up and kick you. The mystery deepens as you watch this rebellious creature walk in circles patiently for a few hours without anyone giving it a whack. I puzzled over this mystery until one day I discovered the secret. First the farmer blindfolds the donkey; then he dabs a bit of sesame paste or peanut paste on the nose. The donkey can smell the paste but cannot see it. The fragrance is enough to motivate the donkey to walk round and round for hours. If it slows down, the farmer simply puts a fresh dab of paste on its nose. The donkey’s attention is focused on this fragrant sesame paste that it is hoping to enjoy.

This is a picture of man, isn’t it? The Antichrist will promise you the things you want. And what do you want? You

want the things that pertain to eternal life *plus* a whole lot of things on earth. Nobody gets a better deal than a Christian in North America today. Turn on the television and the message of the “gospel” comes in. The preacher stands before a crowd and there he does something so captivating that it grips your attention. Flowing down like water from his hands are “greenbacks” (U.S. dollars). The camera focuses on the big basket full of greenbacks in front of the pulpit. This is the sesame paste that is being applied to your nose. If you don’t quite understand this kind of gospel, let the preacher himself explain it to you: “God is so good; he is the God of grace. You are the sons and daughters of our God and King, the creator of heaven and earth.”

This is getting exciting! Amen, Hallelujah! Turn up the volume because I want a stronger whiff of the sesame paste. And there’s more: “According to the Bible, God the Creator owns cattle on a thousand hills. Amen! All the cattle that you see, all the trees in the field, all the oil in the ground—did you make them? Of course not. Did the scientists make them? Of course not. Did the geologists make them? Of course not. Who then made them? Our Father in heaven, that’s who. Amen! Hallelujah! Then it’s up to us to dig it up. All the gold and silver belong to God our Father, and also to his children. Just *claim* it from God. Shame on you! There’s no excuse for being poor when your Father possesses heaven and earth.

You lack faith. So stand up and shout *Hallelujah!* and have faith in God!”

I’m not kidding! Go to North America and turn on the television and tell me whether I am exaggerating or not. I’m telling you the truth. This is the gospel of the sesame paste—a gospel that offers not only eternal life in the future but also the abundant life on earth right now.

“Amen! Hallelujah! Eternal life will come in the future, brothers and sisters. But we are practical people who live for the present. Don’t worry about eternal life when you have four or five decades left; start thinking about it only when you are getting close to the grave. While you are still young and healthy, live for today. As the Bible says, this is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it! Amen! Hallelujah!”

No kidding, brothers and sisters. I’m not inventing anything; I’m only imitating this television preacher. It is not my intention to entertain you but to show you the substance of what the Antichrist will preach. This kind of preaching is already sweeping away millions of people. I can also preach like that. But thanks to God’s grace and mercy, I don’t. My conscience doesn’t allow me to preach a different gospel. What then do I preach? *I preach the cross*. In case you didn’t know, this kind of preaching will never get the multitudes to contribute megabucks to your organization.

Do you know what are the financial assets of those who preach the television gospel? This American evangelist has a broadcasting station and several satellites, each costing tens of millions of U.S. dollars. The central transmitting station is worth another tens of millions. These preachers control entire complexes of hotels, virtually whole towns. If you are wondering what hotels have to do with Christianity, I'm equally puzzled. This is the kind of preaching that will bring in the crowd and the money. The deception we see now is just a prelude of what is to come. When the Antichrist comes, he will promise you what you want: money, good health, and good job prospects.

Jesus Christ's Lordship must be shown in your body

One last thing. To guard yourself from being deceived by the Antichrist, first you must make Jesus Lord and King of your life. Second, you must make him Lord and King of *your body*. The Bible attaches great importance to the body; hence the importance of confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Never think that a teaching is made more spiritual by rejecting the body. I consulted the concordance to see how many times the apostle Paul talks about the body. A quick count tells me that he mentions "body" 88 times, not

counting related words such as “flesh”. I close with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 6:13:

Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body.
(1 Corinthians 6:13, NASB)

Yes, the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. To put it simply, either we live the Christian life victoriously in the physical body or we don’t live it at all. Never think that being a Christian is simply a matter of believing in certain doctrines about Jesus. The way you live your everyday life is very important because it involves your body. It is disturbing that many Christians commit immorality and still think they are going to be saved. In my work in the church, many young people come to me to confess their sins because they could no longer cope with their guilt. Again and again they have confessed to me that they have been guilty of immorality.

Understand Paul’s words: “The body is not for immorality but for the Lord.” If you are a Christian, your very body belongs to the Lord. Why do so many Christians fail to live a victorious life that glorifies our God and King? Often it is because their bodies drag them into sin. But take comfort, for Paul goes on to say, “And the Lord is for the body”. The Lord

does not reject the body; he is for the body. He will give you strength and power to live for his glory *in the body*.

But also bear this in mind: If Jesus is not Lord of your body, he is not Lord of your life at all. A human being cannot be separated into two components, the one physical and the other spiritual. The Bible speaks of the physical and the spiritual as one; your body and your spirit are one. To say that Jesus is Lord of your spirit but not Lord of your body is nonsensical as far as Scripture is concerned.

As I said, the Antichrist will come from within the church, from among those who are living in sin and immorality. If Christ is not Lord of your body, I can say categorically that you will not be saved—not even if you have been baptized, not even if you believe that Jesus died for you. For then you are living in the spirit of Antichrist.

Chapter 5

Antichrist, The Arch-Deceiver

We come to our fifth message on the person of the Antichrist. I have been going slowly in this series of messages because we are dealing with a fairly difficult, yet very important subject. I don't want you to get lost in this subject especially if you are a non-Christian or a young Christian. But no matter who you are, the topic of the Antichrist is relevant because it may even be in our lifetimes that we are going to see the coming of the Antichrist and, shortly after that, the coming of the Lord Jesus himself.

Today I have two main points. Firstly, the Antichrist is going to be an arch-deceiver. This first point leads naturally to the second one, here stated as a question: How can you and I avoid being deceived?

Review of the last message

In the New Testament, the word “Antichrist” is found only in John’s first and second letters. Therefore we must turn to these two letters for a correct understanding of the term “antichrist”. That was what we did last time, and we arrived at some important conclusions. I will not develop that message all over again, but only summarize some of the more important observations. We have seen, for example, that the Antichrist is going to come from *within the church!* It is quite horrifying to realize that the church itself will be the breeding ground of the Antichrist. That, in a way, makes any one of us a candidate for the Antichrist. There are many churches today and many so-called Christians of one kind or another, and it is frightening that the Antichrist could emerge from these or other multitudes of Christians.

Equally disturbing is John’s statement that the Antichrist is going to be a *false Christian*. I would like to impress this remarkable fact very deeply into your minds. The distinctive New Testament teaching on the Antichrist is that he will be a religious person. Contrary to popular belief, the Antichrist will not be a non-Christian; in fact he will be more of a religious figure than a political figure.

Antichrist, the Bible expert

Worse yet, the Antichrist will be a *church leader*. He will far surpass the level of ordinary leaders to become the most outstanding leader in the church. So impressive is his leadership that he will deceive the whole world (Rev.13:3,14).

As the world's foremost religious leader, the Antichrist will also be a religious teacher. His preeminence, together with his superb knowledge of Scripture, will make him by far the most dangerous false teacher in the history of the church. He will be so thoroughly trained in theology and biblical studies that he can overwhelm all but a handful of Christians. If you tell him, "Ha, but this is what the Bible says!" he will reply: "My friend, do you know how much biblical training I have received and how many theological seminaries I have attended? I have been thoroughly trained in the Scriptures." How exactly do you handle that? The Antichrist has already neutralized you; you are now defenseless. As soon as you flip through your Bible, you will notice that his Bible is well worn. He opens his Bible, and what do you see but red markings, green markings, blue markings. His Bible is crammed with notes and footnotes. He is the expert swordsman wielding his spiritual sword—his Holy Bible! You take one look at your Bible, and say to yourself: "Not too presentable. Can't open it in his presence!" The Antichrist

will absolutely intimidate you with his knowledge of the Scriptures.

When Satan was tempting Jesus, his tactic was to refer to the Scriptures: “Thus it is written ...” Fortunately the Lord Jesus knew the Bible better. What about you? Can you tell the difference between truth and falsehood? If a preacher claims that his message is based on the Bible, can you tell? The apostle John warns us that the Antichrist will be a teacher in the church, perhaps as a pastor or evangelist. His exalted position in the church, combined with his expertise in the Bible, will make him exceedingly dangerous.

Antichrist, the arch-deceiver

In this series of messages, I want to show you that the Antichrist will be an arch-deceiver. Deception is so deeply ingrained in the person of the Antichrist that wherever he is mentioned in the New Testament, the word “deception” or a similar concept appears. As a matter of fact, the word “Antichrist” is equated with “deceiver” in 2 John 7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” (ESV)

We are not restricting ourselves to First John and Second John even though the word “antichrist” occurs only in these two letters. The Antichrist is also mentioned elsewhere in

the New Testament by other titles such as the false Christ, the false prophet, the beast, or the man of lawlessness. Wherever the Antichrist is mentioned in the New Testament, the concept of deception, in one form or another, is also mentioned.

Yet many Bible teachers tell us that the Antichrist will be a persecutor of Christians first and foremost. But they are emphasizing the wrong thing because the Bible says that the Antichrist will be a *deceiver* first and foremost. It is true that Antichrist will be a persecutor, but only after the church has long fallen victim to his deception. Only after he has deceived multitudes of Christians will he then persecute the few remaining saints who can see through the deception and refuse to follow him. These saints will be such a small minority that nobody takes notice of them. They will be labelled heretics whereas the Antichrist will be hailed as the super-orthodox Christian. This dangerous trend—where the orthodox is declared heretical, and the heretical, orthodox—has already started in the church. The Bible portrays the last days—the days in which we now live—as the age of deception (2 Tim.3:13; 2 John 7).

Previously we have seen that deception is far more dangerous than persecution. In times of persecution, at least the enemy reveals himself. A far more dangerous enemy is one we cannot identify. We don't know who he is, where he is

hiding, or whether he even exists. We search high and low for him when all the time he is standing right behind us, putting on a smile. We turn around and he immediately becomes innocent-looking. We glance away, and he reverts to his crafty smile. We search high and low for the enemy, not realizing that we are looking for him in the wrong places. When we think we have located the enemy, we get our rifles ready when in fact he is right behind us. He points his gun at us and says: "Gentlemen, put your guns down. You are now my honorable captives."

I am using picture language to show you what will happen when the Antichrist comes. The deception has already begun. The church is looking for the enemy in all the wrong places when, in fact, he is standing right behind everybody. Most Bible teachers and church leaders today don't even know how to identify the enemy. They have been telling us that such and such a person, or some other person, is going to be the Antichrist. In this series of messages, I am going to demonstrate that the Bible teachers today are pointing to the wrong candidates for the Antichrist, misleading many Christians.

Deception is innocent-looking

My wife and I have just returned from a two-day rest on the Hong Kong island of Cheung Chau. On our trip back, I picked

up a copy of the Hong Kong Evening Standard. The front page story was about three Singaporean girls between the ages of 18 and 24 who visited Sydney, Australia. At the Sydney airport, they were greeted by a friendly, well-dressed Australian woman who had a pleasant smile. She struck up a conversation with the three Singaporean girls:

“Your first time in Sydney?”

“Yes, we’re here for the tourist attractions.”

“You have come to the right place. Sydney is very beautiful. Do you have a place to stay?”

“No, but we’re looking for one.”

“No problem. I have a nice place all ready for you. You trust me, I hope.”

“Trust you? Of course we do.” (Asians are too polite to express distrust.)

“In that case, how about a tour around the city?”

How wonderful it was, they thought, to have run into such a nice woman. They got into her car and she gave them a tour of the city. After treating them to refreshments at a restaurant, she drove them to a house in King’s Cross District, for a splendid dinner. After dinner, the girls discovered that their purses had been emptied of their money, their passports, and their return tickets. Then they were kidnapped and

forced into prostitution. The nice lady turned out to be the person in charge of a brothel or prostitution business. One of the girls later escaped and reported everything to the police. This Australian woman was charged with kidnapping and other crimes. Fortunately the girls were rescued. Unfortunately, many victims all over the world do not escape. Sisters, I say to you: please be careful when you travel because we live in a dangerous world in which sex slavery is very common. Some of the most dangerous people in the world are very polite and innocent-looking.

Realize it or not, you may be participating in the deception of the world. Every time you try to pass yourself off as being better than you really are, you are deceiving others. This may happen when somebody asks you what your profession is. So you reply, "I work in an engineering firm," hoping to give the impression that you are an engineer. You failed, however, to mention that you are the night watchman of the engineering company. You haven't lied outrightly, but you gave the false impression that you're an engineer.

What compelled you to deceive in the first place? What is wrong with being a night watchman? Is that a crime? No, but you wanted others to think more highly of you than you really are. What's wrong with the good and honest statement, "I'm a watchman"? God doesn't despise watchmen and neither do we. One of my best friends in Shanghai was a son of a watchman. My father rebuked me for associating with

him because he felt it was socially degrading to be in the company of such people. But I told my father that I was not the least concerned about my friend's social position. His noble character was good enough for me. My friend eventually became an engineer but that hasn't changed my opinion of him. As far as I am concerned, this son of a watchman is still my good and faithful friend.

Deception among Christians

What about Christians? Unfortunately, Christians can be even more dangerous and deceptive. We Christians like to deceive others, don't we? Our pride compels us to get from others the things we don't deserve such as respect or even money. Be careful of Christians or churches that show a keen interest in money. That should immediately signal to you that something is fishy about that church. No matter what excuses they may give to justify themselves, the fact remains that they love money. They may tell you that they need money for the new church building, but that's really of no concern to the church visitors. The churches today have so many fundraising campaigns for so many projects that it makes you wonder if the church is really a money-making organization. In some churches the first thing you see is a wall chart reporting how much money has been collected for

the church building. Then you are bombarded with this never-ending talk about money.

A favorite sermon topic for some pastors is tithing, the practice of giving to God one-tenth of your income. Although the Bible talks about tithing, some people are puzzled that I have never preached a single message on tithing in all the years of my ministry. That's because the churches today have heard too many messages on tithing (at least I have), and they certainly don't need to hear another. Some visitors to our church are puzzled that no offering bag is ever passed around. Is it because we have lost our offering bags? No, it's because we refuse to pass around an offering bag. Is it because we are rich? No, it's because we want people to know that we are not into this business of raising money. In many churches today, it is not uncommon for the pastor to disagree with the church board over his salary. The pastor feels that he deserves a raise, either because he has been receiving the same salary for a few years, or because he feels that his performance merits a raise. In contrast to this, and to the amazement of some visitors, our coworkers would sometimes ask for a pay reduction! The visitors would say, "Have we come to the right place? What kind of strange church is this whose leaders ask for less money?"

Why do Christians deceive? To get something from others, either money or respect. The desire for money is particularly dangerous when the money is said to be used for the Lord's

work. Those who live in the United States or Canada would know that the television stations in North America are full of Christian programs. Can you guess how much it costs to operate a television station? A single program can run into several hundreds of thousands of U.S. dollars. Some Christian organizations not only produce their own television programs, they even have their own broadcasting stations and satellites. Can you imagine how much a satellite costs? Operating so huge a project requires a lot of money. It is not surprising, therefore, that every time you switch on the television to watch the news or some other program, sooner or later you will see another appeal for money by a Christian television organization. Isn't there a better and more scriptural way of preaching the gospel? Where in the New Testament does preaching the gospel ever depend on money? Deception must somehow be used because of this pressing need for an enormous sum of money. Any organization that operates like this will be committed to fundraising, with the dangerous consequences emerging sooner or later.

Deception by Christians: An example

The most recent issue of Time magazine gives us a foretaste of the frightening deception described in the New Testament. A well-known Christian television organization

in North America, PTL (“Praise the Lord”), has its own television stations and even its own satellite for worldwide transmission. Can you even guess their annual income? A cool US\$127 million. Imagine an annual income of 127 million dollars. That’s big business by any standard. You could well imagine what kind of temptation this will bring. The chairman or president or founder of PTL is, of course, Jim Bakker; his wife Tammy is now undergoing treatment for drug addiction. I am mentioning their names only because Time magazine has already mentioned their names. I’m not saying anything that has not been reported by the news media. When I finished reading the Time article, my heart bled within me. Jim Bakker confessed to having an affair with a secretary back in 1981. Now he has to withdraw from the ministry because his sins have been exposed by other Christian leaders.

Jimmy Swaggart, a former Christian pop singer, now a well-known evangelist and preacher in the United States, publicly denounced Jim Bakker, saying that the coverup of his sins was a disgrace to the gospel. Swaggart mercilessly exposed the sins of his fellow preacher and evangelist. These highly-publicized revelations have caused enormous damage to the gospel. The credibility of every preacher is now called into question. Not surprisingly, newspapers all over the world took this chance to bash the church: “Ha! You’re not so holy after all! You sing hymns and preach about God

on television, but look at what a bunch of hypocrites you are!” And the church, caught with the facts, cannot say a word.

Over the past six years since 1981, Bakker had paid a total of US\$115,000 in hush money to a woman with whom he had some kind of affair. He had been blackmailed all these years for the sins he was trying to cover up, but which came out in public anyway because, as the Bible says, you can be sure that your sins will find you out (Numbers 32:23). Sooner or later your sins will come out into the open. Absolutely disastrous! Bakker has harmed the reputation of the gospel. Let me ask one more time: Who does greater damage to the church, the one who persecutes the church or the one who disgraces the church?

For six years this well-known evangelist had been living in sin and trying to cover up everything. I wonder what was going through his mind every time he stood up to preach on television. After paying the woman yet another sum of money, how could he preach the gospel effectively? So Bakker had to deceive his hearers, deceive himself, and deceive just about everybody. He had been living in bondage to sin, in bondage to the flesh, and in deception—deceiving and being deceived.

Before we Christians self-righteously exalt ourselves above the TV evangelists, let us examine our own lives. I wonder whether the average Christian today is living a life

that is much holier. I have been denouncing the unholiness of the church for a long time. Therefore let me ask you: Have you overcome the problem of sin? Or are you still living in bondage to the flesh and to the self? If you are, then you are like this Jim Bakker who, in his attempt to suppress the truth and to keep alive his television ministry, was deceiving and being deceived.

This may help you to understand the New Testament's portrayal of the Antichrist as a Christian leader skilled in the art of deception. Jim Bakker is not, of course, the Antichrist, but he is certainly some kind of antichrist in the fruits of his deeds. His television ministry is a prelude of what is to come: the Antichrist too will have a worldwide preaching and teaching ministry that will exceed that broadcast by the Christian television stations.

Deception under the guise of religion

In carrying out his deception, the Antichrist or any arch-deceiver will somehow associate himself with the church. Deception is carried out more effectively and with less risk of suspicion if the deceiver claims to be a Christian or a church minister. Every crook and liar will use the church to cover his activities.

Here is a report from the same newspaper that I was reading on my way back from Cheung Chau. The headlines

are so big that those sitting at the back can probably read it. This report, published in the Hong Kong Evening Standard, Friday, March 27, 1987, has the headline: HANG MY SON, I WILL PULL THE ROPE. It is unimaginable that a father would hang his son, yet this man was saying, "Hang my son, I will pull the rope!"

This bizarre incident took place in East Lake, Ohio. Here is a photograph of the son being escorted by the police. He claims to be a pastor of a church belonging to a denomination I have never heard of: the United Church of the Ministers of God. Even the church name is designed to deceive people because it appropriates the name "United Church" belonging to several large denominations in North America, including the United Church of Canada.

The deeds of this self-styled "United Church" pastor were exposed when a girl who was riding in his car suspected something fishy about him. At one point the car stopped at the traffic lights. When she saw a police patrol coming by, she jumped out of the car. Smart and quick. She told the police that there was something strange about this so-called pastor or minister. The police entered the house of this "pastor" and discovered a trap door on the floor. Under the trap door they found three women fettered in chains. They had been raped and sexually abused; they were dehydrated and starving. The police then discovered something so gruesome that it makes

me sick even to mention it: a woman's arm in the freezer. Further investigation showed that this so-called pastor had murdered at least two other women. The three women still alive in the basement could have met the same fate because murdering them would be the surest way of silencing them.

As we might expect from the headlines, "Hang My Son, I Will Pull the Rope," the father is saying that his son, this so-called pastor, deserves to be hanged. (With this I would agree because justice has to be carried out.) The father even volunteered to pull the rope himself. He tried to absolve himself of all responsibility by saying that he had not seen his son for twenty years. When the boy was very young, the parents divorced and the mother gained custody of their two sons. She eventually abandoned the boys, so it was left to the father to bring them up from their primary school days.

The father, in saying that his son deserves capital punishment, is probably waxing self-righteous because it seems to me that the father has to bear some responsibility if the son grows up a wicked man. After hanging his own son, perhaps he should also deliver himself to the executioners. The twenty-year separation is no excuse to place the full blame on his son. In fact, the separation itself raises a lot of questions. In any case, the son was eventually charged with more than fifty counts of serious crimes, including kidnapping, rape and murder. And to cover his tracks, he disguised himself as the pastor of a church.

A call for holiness in the church

I am recounting this case not because I take pleasure in doing so, but because I want to show you that this kind of deception is already mentioned in the Bible. The apostle John tells us that the Antichrist will be a false Christian, a false teacher, a false pastor, a false evangelist, a false church leader. The Bible is strikingly perceptive and right on the mark. It does not say that the most wicked people are the non-Christians. On the contrary, and to our surprise, the Bible points the finger at Christians, warning us that the greatest arch-deceiver, the most wicked man ever, will come from the church. Although this is startling and offensive, it is the absolute truth, and we Christians must speak the truth even if it hurts us. Let us be severe with ourselves rather than with the non-Christians because the Bible says that God's judgment will begin with the household of God, which is the church (1Pet.4:17; 1Tim.3:15). Until the church is purified, we Christians have no right to condemn the non-Christians.

The church wants to evangelize and evangelize, but I am very suspicious about its motive. In most cases the motive is to have a big church—500 people, 1000 people, even 20,000. I don't care how many members you have in your church if all these Christians are living in sin, in the flesh, in defeat, forever disgracing the name of God. I don't even care if you have five million people in your church. Let's have a church

of fifty where each person is committed to living in purity of heart, a church whose members can look at one another and say, “If you see any trace of sin in my life, please tell me now.”

If you see any of our coworkers living in sin, report them to me and to the church, and we will not tarry in dealing with them. Our churches will be most severe when it comes to the sins of our coworkers. By the end of the year, we will have some 50 full-time coworkers, and we require of them the highest standard of excellence. Should they fail by ever so little—little, that is, by the standards of the average church today—they will not escape disciplinary action. Our readiness to deal with sin, especially the sins of our coworkers, is already known to anyone who has attended our church for a long time.

My next statement is recorded on tape: If you should find sin in my life, I lay this command upon you to charge me with sin. We must do whatever is necessary to maintain the purity of the church, the body of Christ.

But look at the Christians today. We have church elders who rush out of church service to play mahjonnig. What kind of a church is this? For years I have been denouncing the sins of the church, and have been blacklisted for doing so. But their hatred of me does not bother me. I will never stop denouncing the churches for their sins as long as I still have breath. Some of my fellow pastors might say to me: “Please tone it down because it’s bad for the reputation of the church

when you talk so frankly about her sins.” But I would only reply: “Are the people of the world really so blind? Don’t they have eyes to see the sins in the church? Don’t they know how to read the newspapers for themselves? Do you think I can keep quiet after preaching against the church for so many years?”

In case you didn’t know, I am extremely unpopular among the Chinese churches. For many years I have been denouncing sin and proclaiming holiness because we cannot have one standard for the non-Christians and another standard for ourselves. If you cannot maintain holiness, please stop calling yourself a Christian. At least make this small contribution to the church if you cannot make any other. If you are living in sin, please stop attending church or at least stop calling yourself a Christian; otherwise you would be functioning as an antichrist—as a false Christian who does great harm to the church.

How not to be deceived

We come now to the second point of today’s message. The first point is that the Antichrist is going to be an arch-deceiver and a false Christian. The second point is this: *How can you and I avoid being deceived?* In the remaining time, I

can only briefly mention two things on how not to be deceived.

The first thing is this: You must live in holiness or else you will be deceived. I have been preaching holiness because without it, you would be an easy victim for every deceiver. If you are living in unholiness, if you are enslaved by your sexual desires, you will not be able to discern the truth because your eyes will be veiled by sin and the flesh. The Bible speaks of a veil—the veil of the flesh (2 Cor.3:14ff.; cf. Heb.10:20)—which, if it covers you, would prevent you from discerning the true from the false.

I am preaching this series on the Antichrist or the false Christ because if we cannot discern falsehood, neither can we discern the truth. These are the two sides of the coin. Unless you have been freed from the bondage of sin, you simply would not be able to discern the Lord Jesus or the Antichrist or anyone else. If Jesus should walk into this room right now, would you have the spiritual discernment to tell that he is Jesus? If he came into this room as an ordinary person dressed in everyday clothes, I guarantee that most of you would not be able to recognize him. That was exactly what John the Baptist said to the Jews about Jesus: somebody is standing in your midst but you do not know him (John 1:26). He is the King, the Messiah, and God's appointed Savior, but you do not recognize him.

And if you cannot recognize Jesus, how are you ever going to recognize the Antichrist? Spiritual perception is of paramount importance because the stakes are unimaginably high. At stake is eternal life and death, not just physical life and death. We cannot afford to make a mistake here; that is why I am preaching this series of messages on the Antichrist.

The second thing is this: You must be thoroughly rooted in the word of God. Some people have told me that they have read the Bible a hundred times. I am not asking you how many times you have read the Bible. That's irrelevant. Discernment has nothing to do with how many times you have read the Bible. It is better to read the Bible once and understand what it is saying than to read it a hundred times and not understand. Some people have attended church and Sunday school for many years since childhood, yet cannot answer the most basic questions about the Bible. Coming from a Christian family, or attending Sunday School, or reading the Bible a hundred times—none of these will necessarily lead to a good understanding of the Bible. Any literate person can read the Bible for himself, but that doesn't mean that he understands what he is reading.

That is why our church provides various trainings such as the Basic Training and the Intermediate Training. If you have taken these trainings in our church, you would know that they are based on the two fundamental points I just

mentioned. The trainings are based, firstly, on the principles of a holy life. Secondly, they place heavy emphasis on understanding the Bible and on exegesis (the procedure of expounding the Bible and bringing out its meaning). We do not simply teach you what the Bible says. Equally important is knowing how to ascertain whether a certain teaching is really taught in the Bible. A teaching may sound correct and spiritual, but is it really taught in the Bible? I have met many seminary graduates who do not have the vaguest idea on how to expound the Bible.

Both these things—holy living and knowledge of Scripture—are necessary. They cannot be separated; we cannot have the one and neglect the other. The Basic and Intermediate Trainings are designed to help you in both areas. Some people live a holy life—and that’s commendable of them—but they don’t understand the word of God because they lack training in the word of God. Conversely, if a person does not live a holy life, neither will he be able to expound the Scriptures no matter how much training he may have received.

In this series of messages on the Antichrist, I am going to show you that many Bible teachers err on precisely these two points. They don’t see the importance of a holy life or know how to expound the Bible.

May God be gracious to us so that we may not be deceived, that our eyes may see what is truth and what is falsehood,

that we may understand what God is telling us in the Bible. May he grant us the desire to know the truth and to be set free from the power of sin.

Chapter 6

Truth Versus The Antichrist

Are you interested in the truth? I hope that you're in church today because of a genuine interest in the truth. Truth—which has to do with ultimate reality—would not concern you if you are going after material riches, a good job, or a comfortable home. Pursuing these things will only blind you to truth and reality. When I was a non-Christian, I too was preoccupied with so many things that I pushed out of my mind the truly important questions, including the question of the meaning of life. Many people ignore these questions when they go through the daily routine of working in daytime, and watching television in the evening.

Truth and the resurrection

Truth has everything to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and with his second coming. You see, if what Jesus said about his resurrection did not come to pass, then we don't have to believe anything he said about his second coming either. But if the resurrection has taken place, then we can be confident that Jesus will come again. The Lord's resurrection, therefore, has profound and eternal consequences for our lives.

Several times the Lord Jesus spoke about his own resurrection. In the gospel of Matthew alone, he mentioned it five times—twice to his enemies, and three times to his disciples. He told his listeners that they will witness his resurrection on the third day after his death. That was a very bold statement to make because it would take only three days from his death to confirm the prediction. Yet Jesus was so assured of his own words that he said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Mt.24:35). If those words had come from someone else, we might question his sanity.

But when Jesus spoke about the resurrection, not even his disciples really believed him. The word "believe" is rather vague. The disciples did believe in the resurrection in some vague sense, but Scripture tells us that when Jesus died, none of them *actually* believed that he would rise again. In fact, when the Lord was crucified, the disciples were so frightened

that all of them—except one—fled from the scene. If it were not for this one apostle—John—who stayed by the cross right to the burial, the disciples wouldn't even have known where Jesus was buried. It was so hard for Thomas to believe in the resurrection that even after Jesus had shown himself alive to the other disciples, they could not convince Thomas that the Lord had appeared to them.

Do you believe Jesus will come again?

The parallel is obvious. I wonder how many of you—Christians and non-Christians—truly believe that Jesus will come again. Most Christians would answer “yes” to the question of whether Jesus will come again. But if you look at how they live, you would see that they don't really believe in the Lord's return. As I said, there is a certain vagueness about the word “believe”. We may claim to believe when we don't really believe. Or we may believe partially. I think many Christians are going to be caught in a great surprise when the Lord Jesus comes again.

The Bible tells us that some of the disciples believed in the resurrection, but many doubted. We would have to say, however, that the disciples probably had some justification for their unbelief. They could rightly say that the Old Testament says very little—indeed almost nothing—about

the resurrection of the Messiah or the Christ. At least the Old Testament makes no explicit statement to that effect. But what is our excuse? Can we say that the New Testament is silent about the second coming of Jesus? Like it or not, we cannot give that excuse because the Lord Jesus, on several occasions, spoke unambiguously about his coming again. He not only told his disciples about it, he also told his enemies. When he was put on trial, the religious leaders asked him whether he was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One (Mk.14:61). He said to them: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven!" At these striking words, the high priest tore his own clothes, accused Jesus of blasphemy, and demanded the death penalty.

Truth is stranger than fiction. When Jesus spoke about the resurrection, many of his listeners thought that he was telling them a fairy tale. What about you? Are you truly convinced that Jesus will come again, or do you also take it as a fairy tale?

The Lord's second coming is linked not only with truth, but also with its opposite. Paul tells us of something extraordinary that will take place shortly before Jesus comes again: *the great lie or apostasy* (2 Thess. 2:3). Here we are confronted, once again, with the choice between truth and falsehood. If we refuse to believe the truth, we will believe the great lie because there is no middle ground between them. Paul is

telling us that it will be increasingly difficult to believe the truth as we enter the days of the Antichrist.

We saw last time that deception is so deeply ingrained in the person of the Antichrist that wherever he is mentioned in the New Testament, the word “deception” or a similar concept appears. In 2 John 7, the Antichrist is explicitly called the deceiver: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.” (ESV)

The battle between truth and falsehood is not going to be fought in an obvious way, but in a frighteningly hidden way. It will be very difficult to tell who is speaking the truth and who is speaking falsehood. How can we protect ourselves from being deceived? To this question we must find an answer because it is a matter of *eternal life and death*.

Three problems concerning truth

The whole intent of deception is to present falsehood as truth, and truth as falsehood. This is the tragic situation of our world today, and it is something that you and I will have to face sooner or later. Already many people have been deceived. Some people speak the truth, but many others skillfully present falsehood as truth. In our attempt to find

the truth, sooner or later we will encounter three enormous difficulties regarding the truth.

First, *truth is hidden*. Truth does not lie on the surface of things. The Bible says that truth will not stare at us obviously. That is why most people are oblivious to the truth. As I said, you can go through life without paying any attention to the truth. The average man in the street is more keen about the latest CD player or digital television set. With so many exciting gadgets to keep you occupied, who has time to think about truth? As truth is a hidden truth, so God is a hidden God. Look around you. Can you see God? Isaiah 45:15 says, “Truly, you are a God who hides himself.” Similarly, the kingdom of God is hidden, as evident in the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price (Mt.13:44–46).

This leads to the second problem in finding the truth. The word “find” implies *effort*. It takes hard work to look for anything, and most people are unwilling to expend that kind of effort. Those who lack determination will never find the truth. Truth is like gold; it does not lie on the surface; you need to dig deep to find it. Few people are willing to expend that much effort to find the truth, or, to use the Lord’s parable, to find the pearl of great price. But even if you eventually find the priceless pearl, there is another problem: You are going to discover that this priceless pearl will *cost you everything*. Many people, when confronted with the truth,

would only admit: “Yes, I know you’re speaking the truth, but I simply can’t pay the cost!”

The third problem is how to tell the difference. Can you tell a genuine pearl from a fake one?

Today we consider only the third problem: *How do we distinguish truth from falsehood?* Alas, alas! Finding the truth, or finding God, or finding the kingdom, is simply too great a problem! If it were not for God’s work in our hearts, who could ever find the truth?

But there is something else about truth: it has a way of sticking into your throat. When somebody points out your mistakes, your most likely reaction would be to reject the correction: “What nerve, talking to me like that!” Even if you admit the truth of the statement, it doesn’t make it any easier to accept. In my ministry of counselling people, I often have to speak the truth. And do you know what? They hate me for it. Sometimes I wish I don’t have to speak the truth, but I must. When you help people analyze their problems and warn them of the possible consequences, will they be grateful? No!

Speaking the truth has never won me any popularity contest. I have many enemies, not because I like making enemies, but because I am called to speak the truth even if it makes me unpopular. I am not a politician who say things to win your vote. A servant of God is called to speak the truth

even if he gets spit in the face for it. Have you ever looked at the teachings of the Lord Jesus? He tells us the very things we don't want to hear. And if any Bible teacher skips over the offensive part of the Lord's teachings, he is a false teacher. The ultimate false teacher—the Antichrist—will tell you the very things you like to hear.

An erroneous concept of the Antichrist

Last Friday, while we were sending off some brothers and sisters at the airport, my daughter was given a leaflet with an interesting title: “The Ancient Roman Arena Appears Again in Singapore!” The opposite page says, “Represent God to Execute Justice! Vanquish the Tyrant Lee Kwan Yew!” If you think this is a political tract, you're in for a surprise. This tract was published by a church that calls itself “New Testament Church”. The leaflet begins like this:

Superficially Singapore is a free democratic country with the rule of law, but in actual fact, the Lee Kwan Yew government is an Antichrist [notice the word *Antichrist*], a rebellious bloc which persecutes the church. Lee Kwan Yew is a merciless inhuman tyrant! The Lee dynasty is a subhuman bestial regime!

This church published the tract over an incident which started when one of their members was arrested by the

government. To protest the arrest, they organized a demonstration, but this only led to more arrests.

Before proceeding further, let us ask some questions about this so-called New Testament Church. From the tone of the tract, do you think this represents a New Testament church? Let me read to you the closing lines: *“The Most High God who rules in human kingdoms says, ‘I shall turn Singapore into a dung pit and the abode of jackals. Passers-by will be astounded and mock at her.’”*

At one point Lee Kwan Yew is labelled a Hitler, and all kinds of curses are pronounced upon Lee Kwan Yew and Singapore. I’m embarrassed. How can this church call itself New Testament Church? Please don’t get me wrong. I have nothing personal against this church; I don’t know who they are; I had never heard of them. But how can New Testament Christians curse in this way? What does Jesus say in Matthew 5:44? “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” What does Paul say in Romans 12:14? “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” But what do we see here but cursing?

How to avoid error

In citing this example, I mainly wish to draw your attention to the statement that Lee Kwan Yew is the Antichrist. This clearly shows that the so-called New Testament Church has a completely erroneous concept of the Antichrist. What then must we do to avoid making similar errors? To avoid error, we must do a number of things.

First, we must learn to think clearly. This point is so obvious that you may suppose that most people would make an effort to think clearly. Yet most people—Christians included—are very muddled and incapable of clear thinking. It is surprising how few people can think clearly. Despite a heavy schedule, I read many books every year, and I am often compelled to write comments in the margins of these books to highlight what is an obviously nonsensical or illogical statement. Brothers and sisters, please look to the Lord for the grace to think clearly. God has given us a mind, and we must learn to use it just as we use our other faculties.

Second, a thorough grasp of Scripture is vital for discerning spiritual truth.

Third, we must ask God to transform our lives so that our spiritual eyes may be opened to see spiritual things. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor.2:14). Spiritual discernment is not a matter of intelligence. A person may be highly intelligent, but if he is spiritually dead, he would not

be able to see spiritual things. Jesus says that except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). His inability to see the kingdom is not due to any lack of intelligence, but because he doesn't have spiritual vision.

Fourth, it is not enough to be born again; we must press on to spiritual maturity. Spiritual immaturity is a common cause of spiritual error. Hebrews 5:14 says that the spiritually mature are those who have their faculties trained to discern good and evil.

Muddled thinking about the Antichrist: an example

I recently read several books on the Antichrist, one of which is this colorful and interesting book titled *How to Recognize the Antichrist* by A.E. Bloomfield. I'm afraid that if you're going to follow the advice of this book, you will not recognize the Antichrist at all! Before I explain why, I would like to recall something from a previous message.

Previously we have seen that *anti* has two possible meanings in Greek. The word can mean "against" (which is the common meaning in modern English, but only a secondary meaning in Greek), or it can mean "in place of" or "a substitute for". In our examination of *antichristos*, we established that *anti* has the latter meaning in the Greek, i.e., the

Antichrist will be a pseudo Christ (or substitute Christ) rather than a contra Christ. Refer to the Appendix at the end of this book. In coming to this conclusion, we are on safe exegetical ground because the Lord Jesus never speaks of the Antichrist in the sense of contra Christ, but only in the sense of pseudo Christ (e.g. Mt.24:5; Lk.21:8).

In spite of this fact, of all the books about the Antichrist, only Bloomfield's shows any awareness of the important distinction between contra Christ and pseudo Christ. But he rejects the idea of the Antichrist being a pseudo Christ or substitute Christ, for this reason: "If the world thought that he was Christ, they would be more likely to crucify him than to worship him" (p.17).

Do you see any problems with this argument? It sounds convincing, doesn't it? Following this logic, if the Antichrist is a substitute Christ, then people would crucify the Antichrist just as they crucified the real Christ. This argument sounds convincing, but it is riddled with logical and factual errors.

The serious factual error that he falls into is the all too common confusion of the two different senses of the word "Christ". Although they refer to the same person, it is important to differentiate between "Christ" as a title of the historical Jesus who was crucified, and "Christ" as the glorious title of the coming Savior King, the Messiah. The Jews are still waiting for the Messiah in the latter sense, just as we

Christians await Jesus' return as the glorious Messiah-King. The Antichrist (or pseudo Christ) will pretend to be Christ in precisely this latter sense. He will pretend to be Christ the glorious Messiah, not Christ the crucified servant. When Bloomfield talks about the crucifixion of the Antichrist, he has obviously confused the two senses of *Christ*.

In the same stroke, he has also confused the first and the second comings of the Lord Jesus. Whereas his book is supposed to be about the second coming, he is now talking about the first coming. Had he been more observant, he would have seen from 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 that the Antichrist will imitate Jesus in his second coming rather than his first coming. The first time Jesus came, he came as a suffering servant; but when he comes again, he will come as King and Judge—at which time nobody will even attempt to crucify him. It is not the crucified Christ (first coming) but the glorious Christ (second coming) that the Antichrist will imitate. Hence it is nonsensical and irrelevant to even talk about a crucified Antichrist.

Although the Antichrist will not be crucified, yet it seems that Satan is so anxious that his pseudo Christ should bear as much resemblance to Jesus as possible that he arranges for the Antichrist to receive a death blow or a mortal wound (Rev.13.3,12). From this apparently fatal condition the Antichrist will rise again in an evident attempt to imitate

Jesus' resurrection. How he receives this death blow has not been revealed. In any case, Bloomfield is also incorrect in assuming that the Antichrist will not face death. Satan is willing to let him face death, or near death, or apparent death, so that he will resemble Jesus even in this respect. As a result of the death-blow, the Antichrist will evidently bear the wound, or death mark, in his body—again in imitation of Jesus, the “Lamb that was slain” (Rev.13.8) whose death mark will remain visible for all to see. Finally, we are also told that the Antichrist's resurrection-like return from death will be so dramatic and so powerful in its effect that it will draw the whole world after him (Rev.13.3).

The substitute Christ as an enemy of Christ

Bloomfield (p.17) goes on to quote 1 John 2:22, “Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” (ESV) He then quotes v.18 and states, “In these verses John recognizes the fact that there is to be an Antichrist, a special individual who will be *against* Christ” (emphasis his).

What is Bloomfield's point? In v.18 the word *Antichrist* appears, but the idea of “against” does not: “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” (ESV)

If Bloomfield's point is that Antichrist is against Christ by the act of denying that Jesus is the Christ, then he is certainly correct. But this in no way supports his argument against a substitute Christ as he erroneously supposes. Being against Christ is already implicit in the term "substitute Christ" (in the sense of usurper, that is, a false or pseudo Christ.)

If the Antichrist is a pseudo Christ who claims to be Christ, he will deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. But isn't that exactly in accord with 1 John 2:22 which says that the anti-christ denies Jesus is the Christ? The same verse says that he also "denies the Father," which accords with the fact that the Antichrist will proclaim himself God (2 Thess.2.4).

The act of denying that Jesus is the Christ does not mean that the Antichrist will deny that there is a Christ or Messiah, because if he did that he would thereby rule himself out as Messiah. His being against Jesus, by denying that Jesus is the Christ, shows that the Antichrist is an apostate who has returned to a state of unbelief. Unbelievers reject both Jesus Christ and God, so they are indeed enemies of God, something which was true of all of us when we were unbelievers (cf. Rom.5.10, "while we were yet enemies"; Col.1.21). From this it can be seen that the Antichrist is an enemy of Christ just as every unbeliever is an enemy of Christ, but also in the more specific sense of trying to usurp Christ's office and glory.

What is being obscured by the constant insistence that the Antichrist is *solely* a contra Christ is the *deadly deception* in the work of the Antichrist. Notice the word “liar” in the very verse quoted by Bloomfield (1 John 2.22).

In the various passages referring to the Antichrist from Matthew to Revelation, this element of deception stands out. In Matthew 24.24, Jesus directs our attention to “false messiahs and false prophets”; he does not generally speak of contra Christs.

If the Antichrist is truly a contra Christ, we would be able to identify him as a contra Christ by his open hostility to Christ in which he publicly opposes and attacks Christ and his church. What then would be the point of the Lord’s warning that these false christs will make every effort to deceive even the elect (Mt.24.24)?

In view of all this, is it not clear that the great deception is already in progress? Even the teachers and writers on this subject appear, strangely and alarmingly enough, to be deceived already. It is now apparent that the elect are indeed in danger of being led astray.

I shall not bother to further analyze Bloomfield’s book, except to say that it contains still other errors.

Antichrist, super world dictator?

Recently I have read four books on the Antichrist, plus a number of other books on the last things. Let me give you the titles of these four books because they are pertinent to my message today. I have already mentioned the first book, *How to Recognize the Antichrist* by Bloomfield. The second is *The Coming Antichrist* by W.K. Price. The third is *When Your Money Fails: 666* by Mary S. Relfe (as you know, 666 is said to be the secret code of the Antichrist). The fourth is *The Coming World Dictator* by John Wesley White.

These four books have one thing in common: they all portray the Antichrist as the coming world dictator. This is already apparent from the title of the fourth book, *The Coming World Dictator*. These writers differ over certain details but they all agree that before Jesus comes again, there will be this great world dictator. Bloomfield even says that the Antichrist will be a super-Hitler. Why? Because he will persecute the Jews even more brutally than Hitler ever did.

When Your Money Fails describes how this super-dictator will control all the money in the world, and even take bank notes out of circulation. If you have any cash left, you might as well dig a hole and bury your money because this super-dictator will control the world monetary system. How then will you buy and sell? Simple, says the writer. Just as nowadays you would use a charge card, so the day is coming

when you will use a super charge card with the number 666 on it.

Let me try to understand this. If a boy goes to a corner store to buy a handful of sweets, will he present a plastic card and have the amount deducted from his account? Not exactly, says the writer, because it will not be an ordinary card. The super-dictator will implant this card, or a symbol of it, into your right hand or into your forehead. We are told that the technology for this already exists. They will use a special device to implant an invisible mark into your forehead— instantly and painlessly! If you don't want it on your forehead, you can have it on your hand. When you buy something from a store, your forehead or your hand will be scanned by a device similar to those that read product barcodes.

This marvelous system has many advantages. For one thing, you will never lose your money. You will never forget to bring along your charge card. American Express will never have to remind you, "Don't leave home without it!" because it's implanted in you. Even more wonderful, nobody can steal it from you. You will never have to worry that your passport or identity card may be stolen.

It is interesting that every book on the Antichrist portrays him as a super world-dictator who will control our lives so totally that without the number 666 we cannot buy or sell anything. There is plausibility in all this because something to this effect is mentioned in Revelation 13.

But if this is how you will try to recognize the Antichrist, I am afraid you will not recognize him at all. That is quite a statement to make, but we need only ask: What is the New Testament definition of Antichrist?

New Testament definition of Antichrist

In the New Testament, the word *antichrist* (Greek *antichristos*) is found only in the first and second letters of John. Therefore our definition of *Antichrist* must derive from John's usage of this word in his letters. The following are all the occurrences of *antichristos* in the New Testament (all quoted from ESV):

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:22)

... and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (1 John 4:3)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 7)

From these passages and their contexts, we can deduce four things about “Antichrist”.

First, when John uses the term *antichrist*, he is referring to false Christian teachers, i.e., Christians who teach false teaching. John even tells us where these antichrists come from: they come from “us”—that is, from the church (1 John 2:19).

Second, these false teachers make their teachings sound plausible *by making them sound spiritual*. They teach for example that Jesus did not come in the flesh with a physical human body like ours, for he is too spiritual and too holy to take part in human flesh. But the fact is that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus came as a human being with a physical body like ours.

Third, although these antichrists are Christian leaders and teachers, *they do not live godly lives*. John tells us that they walk in darkness rather than light. One sure evidence of this is their lack of love. If a church is lacking in love, you can be sure that it doesn’t have the truth. That is why John, particularly in his first and second letters, is constantly talking about love—not human love, but God’s love manifested in our lives.

Fourth, the Antichrist is strictly a *religious figure*. Contrary to popular belief, he is not a political figure, much less a super dictator. He may have political influence, but he is foremost a religious figure. A parallel would be Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini who is mainly a religious figure but has immense political influence.

These four points do not fit the picture of the Antichrist that our friends describe. After looking at the scriptural definition of *Antichrist*, it may come as a great surprise—and embarrassment—to us Christians to discover that the greatest liar in history will be a *Christian!* When we Christians acknowledge this, we are slapping our own faces. But that is exactly what the Bible says. The Bible, from beginning to end, is ruthlessly honest. It tells us that the Antichrist is going to be a Christian, not a non-Christian. The Antichrist will go out from “us”—*that is, from the church!* That is too shocking a statement for many Bible teachers, which is why they would rather speak of a world dictator without ever mentioning that he will be a Christian, much less a prominent Christian teacher and church leader.

The Bible warns us that the first victims of the Antichrist will not be unbelievers but Christians. After reading the leaflet by the “New Testament Church,” I find this very plausible. How can any group of Christians call themselves a New Testament church when they behave and write in a way

that is totally contrary to the spirit of Christ and of the New Testament? It seems that the great deception has already begun. Unless you are committed to pursuing the truth, you may be the next victim of deception. May the Lord grant you the desire to pursue the truth wholeheartedly.

Chapter 7

Apostasy and The Antichrist

Damned Through the church?

Yesterday I visited a Christian bookstore, and there I saw a book with a title that rather surprised me. What was the title? It was *Damned Through The Church*. The word “damned” doesn’t sound polite, and you don’t expect to find it on the cover of a book, much less the cover of a Christian book. I took another look to see if I had read it correctly. Sure enough it was *Damned Through The Church*. I gulped and said to myself, “That’s really something! I thought this is a Christian bookstore!” I picked up the book to see what crank wrote the book, and got another surprise: the writer is Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a well-known North American theologian, lawyer, and writer. I immediately bought this inexpensive book and read through it last night.

This book is a small collection of messages that Dr. Montgomery gave at a Christian conference. The title of the book, *Damned Through the Church*, is taken directly from the conference theme. In his preface Montgomery says that he originally proposed a much stronger theme than “Damned Through the Church”. Originally it was going to be “Going To Hell Through the Church”! But when the conference organizer heard about it, he went into such a fright that he phoned Montgomery and pleaded, “Dr. Montgomery, will you please tone down the theme? We are absolutely terrified of *Going To Hell Through the Church!*” Montgomery agreed to tone down the theme, so he changed it from “Going to Hell Through the Church” to “Damned Through the Church.” But in his preface Montgomery says, “I don’t mean in substance to weaken the original idea of the title. The word *damned* in its biblical meaning means just that—*condemned to hell.*” Although Montgomery changed the title, he retained the force and substance of the original title.

What strikes me most about this book is that there are still some people today who, out of their love for the church, dare to point out the faults and errors of the church. It is a rare man today who has the courage to speak out so boldly against the church. I am talking about writers who love the church, not those who hate the church. I know from first-hand experience that this is done at great risk to one’s own popularity in the church, especially among church leaders.

What is Montgomery saying? He is saying that the church, for the most part, has lost its fundamental character in the western world. It is a world in which Christianity has been an old tradition—a tradition in which people and their forefathers have been going to church for many generations. Over the centuries, the church has changed so drastically that Christians in the west don't even know what they are doing in church. Montgomery says that many Christians go to church simply out of habit. They regard church-going as a hallowed tradition, and if they should miss the Sunday service, they will soothe their troubled conscience by attending church the following Sunday.

Montgomery then raises a question concerning the western churches: *What exactly do people go to church for?* (For that matter, this question applies equally to churches in East Asia.) Montgomery says that many people go to church mainly to join social activities. He talks about spaghetti suppers. He talks about sewing bees where women get together to sew things for relief and charitable causes. All these social activities are good, he says, but they have absolutely nothing to do with the church as far as the New Testament is concerned. And if these are your reasons for going to church, then not only will the church not save you, *it will even become the means of your condemnation!* It takes a bold man to make a statement like that.

The great apostasy

Having said all this by way of introduction, I will, in this seventh message on the Antichrist, deal with the subject of *apostasy and the Antichrist*. Let us read Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come [the day of Jesus' return will not come] unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4, NASB)

The Bible is prophetic and reveals to us many things that we would not know from any other source. Here the Bible mentions two significant things that must take place before Jesus comes again in glory. One is the great apostasy. The other is the appearing of the “man of lawlessness” or, in some manuscripts, the “man of sin”. In verse 8 of the same chapter, he is called the “lawless one”. Apostasy is therefore inseparably linked with this frightening figure known as the man of sin, or the man of lawlessness, who functions by the power of Satan.

I am preaching on the Antichrist because we are getting closer to the great apostasy than we may realize. The

apostasy is not something that will only emerge in the distant future or the near future. *Right now we are already living in the time of the apostasy!*

Why do I say so? *It is because the church has already apostatized.* The church today has become a social center where people, in their boredom or loneliness, get together to enjoy a little bit of religion or morality or social life. Here is where Dr. Montgomery, in *Damned Through the Church*, is right on target. He is one of the few church leaders who are warning us that the church can become an instrument not of salvation but of sending people to hell!

What is your reason for going to church? Are you numbered among the multitudes of Christians who go to church with wrong motives? The church, sad to say, is encouraging wrong motives by giving people a wrong idea of what the church is about. Let's not talk about churches in North America or England or anywhere in the west. Right here, in Hong Kong, many churches are social centers. The other day I was talking with a Bible study leader from another church, and he confessed to me that his so-called Bible study group is nothing more than a social gathering. There is nothing wrong with social gatherings as such, but that is *not* the essence of the New Testament church.

The church has lost its credibility

In these last days we must speak first to the church before we have the right to speak to the non-Christian world. The church today is totally discredited in the eyes of the world. TIME magazine has been reporting again and again, week after week, on the shameful things (including adultery and the swindling of church funds) committed by some prominent church leaders. In the past few weeks, millions of non-Christians all over the world have read in TIME magazine the unsavory accounts of the sins of a well-known church leader. According to the latest report, he had paid a woman over a quarter million U.S. dollars to cover up his adultery. And when his sins were finally exposed, what action did his church take? They only removed him from church leadership. Let me tell you something: the New Testament church would have dealt with him much more severely. In the days of the early church, at a time when holiness was still important, this church leader would have met a terrifying fate. But today he is kicked out of leadership because he is an *embarrassment* to his church.

To make things worse, in the Christian organization led by him, ninety million U.S. dollars were found missing and could not be accounted for. The church officials tried to hush this up, but it's all reported in TIME magazine.

Something is dreadfully wrong with the church. Before the church can again be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, we Christians had better start dealing with ourselves first. In saying these things, we are not condemning other people but condemning ourselves. We *are* the church, and when we speak against the church—for its sins, its wickedness, its deceptions—it is only because we love the church. We must never take a don't-care attitude towards the church. We must never be indifferent when a non-Christian taunts us: “All along we knew you were a bunch of hypocrites! You're no different from us after all!” He says this with a happy smirk on his face, but to us it is a knife that cuts deep into our hearts because we *are* the church. It is our own credibility that is being destroyed by these Christian leaders.

Apostasy and the church

The church has apostatized. To apostatize means to turn away from God. Apostasy, according to this definition, can only apply to the church and to Christians because no one can turn away from God who had not first turned to God. A non-Christian cannot commit apostasy because he has never believed in God or committed himself to God in the first place. Therefore, whenever Paul speaks of apostasy, it is always in connection with the church.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 quoted above, Paul connects the great apostasy with the man of sin. This man is the central figure of apostasy. He is the product of apostasy as well as the promoter of apostasy. 1 John 2:19 gives us the frightening revelation that the man of sin, or the Antichrist, *will come from the church!* This statement, though shocking and offensive, accords with the fact that only Christians can apostatize. The Bible speaks with a forthrightness that is far more devastating than any title Montgomery could ever come up with, even a title such as *Going To Hell Through The Church*. Two thousand years before Montgomery, the Bible had already foretold that the church, except for a faithful remnant, will apostatize. This is happening right before our eyes.

Antichrist, world dictator?

In my last message I pointed out that the very teaching or exegesis on the Antichrist has gone off the track. I introduced you to four books on the Antichrist, all of which contradict the apostle John when they say that the Antichrist will come from *outside* the church. In fact one book expressly says that the Antichrist will not be a Christian of any description, not even a nominal Christian, but will be a total non-Christian who comes from *outside* the church.

Furthermore, these four books say that the Antichrist will be a world dictator who is going to oppress the church. One book is even titled *The Coming World Dictator*. These four writers hold several university and seminary degrees among themselves, including two doctorates, so they are not ignorant. Yet with one voice and with the authority of their so-called academic knowledge, they are telling us that the Antichrist will be a world dictator.

Their exegesis is wrong because, as we saw last time, the New Testament never portrays the Antichrist as a political figure, but only as a false teacher within the church. Even now the church is ravaged by many false teachers, and the confusion that they create is making it difficult for people to tell who is speaking the truth and who is speaking falsehood.

On this issue of the Antichrist, you don't have to be a theologian or Bible scholar to tell who is speaking the truth. You need only look at the first and second letters of the apostle John, these being the only places in the New Testament where the word "antichrist" is used. No matter how you study "antichrist" in the Bible, you would see that the Bible never portrays the Antichrist as a world dictator. The term "world dictator" does not even occur in John's letters. John tells us that, on the contrary, the Antichrist will come from within the church! The Antichrist—the most dangerous teacher and leader in church history—will be a deceiver first and

foremost; yet most Bible teachers say that the Antichrist will be a world dictator. I am ready to debate any theologian on this issue because the Bible's position is clear and incontrovertible.

Now I can agree that it is possible to have a world dictator who will oppress Christians. There is nothing new or unusual about such world dictators, and they have existed all through history. So these four writers are not saying anything of significance when they speak of a world dictator who will persecute Christians. Many centuries ago, the known world was ruled by a succession of Roman emperors, some of whom persecuted Christians brutally. They were absolute world dictators on a scale that we no longer see today. Today we don't have a power—nor even a superpower—that controls the known world.

Therefore I can agree with these four books when they speak of a world dictator who is going to persecute Christians. I can agree with that element of truth in these books. *But they are in grave error when they call this world dictator the Antichrist!*

This world dictator whom they equate with the Antichrist is no more an antichrist (in the New Testament sense of the word) than the Roman emperors were antichrists. In fact this world dictator is no more an antichrist than Hitler was an antichrist. And Hitler doesn't even meet the most basic requirements of being an antichrist because, according to

John, the Antichrist is a church leader who comes out from the church. But Hitler never came out of the church; he remained a professing Catholic. So these four books are not saying anything new when they speak of a ruthless world dictator who will oppress the church. I acknowledge the possibility of such a world dictator, *but that is not the Antichrist!*

False teaching has entered the church

Why am I citing these books and pointing out their errors? It is because we want to examine the origins of apostasy.

Apostasy, according to the New Testament, begins with false teachings, particularly those which twist New Testament words and give them false meanings and emphases. That is the beginning of apostasy, indeed the very root of apostasy. Of this the apostle John warns us when he says that the Antichrist—the ultimate false teacher—will still teach about Jesus, but in a way that deviates from the apostles' teaching.

Are you committing the same sort of thing? Are you subjecting the word of God to your own intellectual control? Are you preventing it from revealing something to you? False teaching begins when we use the same words, the same terms—and twist their meanings. The word “Antichrist” itself has been twisted to mean some kind of world dictator even

though the New Testament never portrays the Antichrist as such. This is a sign that the apostasy has already begun.

The problem of false teaching goes beyond the question of the Antichrist; it relates to fundamental concepts such as Christ, Lord, God, grace, sovereignty, faith, sin, and so on. When you hear these familiar terms being used in a church, do not immediately assume that the church is teaching correct doctrine. I have studied theology long enough to know that theologians are experts in twisting the meanings of words.

That is why Bible study and Bible training are important. Some visitors are surprised at the number of trainings offered by our church. Recently we introduced yet another training called Commitment Training. No sooner had we sunk our teeth into one training than a new one comes up. We are offering so much Bible training because, as Montgomery points out in his book, God is never neutral about the church. The church is either a blessing or a condemnation to you, and we certainly don't want our church to be a condemnation to anybody. Therefore it is vital for you to understand the truth as taught in the Scriptures, and to receive Bible training so that you may understand the Bible for yourself. You must never assume that the pastor is always right. The pastor may be wrong; I may be wrong. That is why we are concerned with exegesis (the procedure of expounding the Bible and bringing out its meaning) in order that you

may find out for yourself what the Bible is saying. If you are given the chance to receive training but do not take it, that is not our responsibility. The church may then become a condemnation to you even though we have tried hard to make it a blessing to you.

Do you know the meaning of “grace”?

Since apostasy begins with the distortion of biblical words, we had better get our definitions right. Go to any church and ask the pastor or leader to define *grace*: “You have been preaching so much on grace. Saved by grace. All of grace. That’s wonderful, but can you tell me what grace is?”

The standard answer is that grace is a free gift from God. To be saved by grace is to be saved by a free gift from God. But if that is how you understand grace in the Bible—as a free gift—then you are off the mark. That is not the primary meaning of *grace* but only a secondary or derivative meaning. For the sake of your eternal salvation, get a Bible dictionary or a theological dictionary, and look up for yourself the definition of *grace*. At least the scholars are honest enough to tell us what grace really means.

What then is grace? Grace is God’s loving favor towards us by which we receive *power* as a gift. Grace is not a gift for the sake of a gift, but a power that saves us. Grace is certainly a

gift, but its potency lies not so much in its being a gift as in its being a power. Do you see this important distinction? If not, sooner or later you will deviate from the biblical teaching on grace, and arrive at a wrong definition that may still sound right because it is dangerously close to what the Bible teaches. A half-truth is always more dangerous than a total lie because a half-truth contains elements of truth and sounds plausible.

As a young Christian I was taught that grace is a free gift. But every time I saw the word “grace” in the Bible, I would run into the same problem. I would be scratching my head wondering what Paul was talking about. This is a common problem with false teaching. Many people cannot understand the Bible because they have been misled by a definition that is wrong or partially wrong. Have you ever noticed that most of Paul’s letters begin and end with the word “grace”? In many of his letters, Paul makes opening statements such as “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” or closing statements such as “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (e.g., Gal.1:3; 6:18). These statements confused me. Why would Paul speak of grace as being with my spirit? I thought that grace is a free gift! Is Paul referring to some free gift that is with my spirit? But hadn’t I already received the free gift of Christ when I became a Christian? So what free gift is Paul talking about? Have I missed out on any free gifts?

Paul is, of course, talking about God's *enabling power* that is with our spirit. If only someone had told me that earlier, what confusion could have been avoided. Why is it important for grace, or God's enabling power, to be with our spirit? Because we cannot live the Christian life except by grace or God's enabling power. That is the primary meaning of grace (e.g., 1 Cor.15:10; 2 Cor.1:12; 8:1-2; 9:8; 12:9; Acts 14:26; Rom.1:5; 6:14; Titus 2:11-12). Paul's statement is now beginning to make sense. As you live by God's enabling power, may God's good pleasure or favor be with your spirit.

Do you know the meaning of "faith"?

Let us look at the word "faith". Faith is important because we are saved by grace through faith. But the same has happened to this word as happened to "grace". It is pitiful that many Christians do not have the vaguest idea of what faith means. Worse yet, many people think they know when they really do not. Again, get yourself a Bible dictionary or a theological dictionary, and read for yourself what faith really means. Whereas faith certainly has the elements of trusting and believing, it means much more than just believing that Jesus died for us.

It is widely taught that we need only believe a few standard items: that Jesus died for us, that he rose again, that he saves

us. Some will say, "I believe the church creeds, I believe the Nicene Creed, I believe the Apostles' Creed; I believe everything. Amen!" They can believe in all the church creeds, yet have as much spiritual life as the floor planks of the church building. Søren Kierkegaard condemned the church in Denmark for having a dead orthodoxy in which one can believe in all the right doctrines yet not experience their power or reality. That kind of faith is purely intellectual and devoid of the power of grace.

Even as a young Christian, I had already sensed that there was something wrong with this shallow definition of faith. But I could not pinpoint the error because I lacked the training and the equipment. I would later spend three years studying the meaning of faith, and take down over 300 pages of notes on this subject.

Faith: An illustration

You can illustrate faith very simply like this. I live on the 12th floor. If somebody should ask me whether I believe the elevator can take me to my apartment, I might say, "Of course I believe. I saw the notice which says that the elevator had been certified by an engineer to be in good working condition. I've seen other people use it. When the doors close and then reopen, the person is no longer there. I presume that he

was taken up to another floor. Therefore I truly believe in elevators with all my heart!”

But if I stand outside the elevator for five or six hours believing fervently with all my heart, my faith won't take me to my apartment! I may argue that a faith which saves me ought to be able to transport me to the 12th floor. Yet my faith accomplishes nothing for me when I just stand in the lobby. No, I would have to do something more than just believe in the effectiveness and reliability of elevators. I need to get *into* the elevator. It's that simple. That is the meaning of commitment. Commitment means to do something with your believing. James says that mere believing does not save us unless we do something with our faith.

The churches in Europe, whether in Germany or Denmark or some other country, all believe to a great extent. But that is not going to save them. You too can believe in all the church doctrines, but that is not going to save you either. To use another analogy, you can believe with all your heart that airplanes are engineered to fly you to San Francisco. But that faith won't get you anywhere unless you believe in such a way that you enter *into* the aircraft. The Bible uses the Greek preposition *eis* (“into”) which, when combined with the verb “believe,” gives you the important term “believe into”. Saving faith is not “believing that” but “believing into”. We must believe *into* Jesus Christ as we believe *into* the aircraft, that

is, to have a faith by which we enter the aircraft and entrust it to fly us to San Francisco.

You can believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, but unless you believe *into* him, and take the step of commitment *into* him, you will not be saved. Has anybody told you that? Nobody told me that when I was a young Christian. I had to spend three years studying every verse on faith in the Old and New Testaments. Then I realized that faith essentially means obedience or commitment, and I wondered why nobody had told me this earlier.

Zondervan Bible Dictionary gives the following definition of faith: "Faith is not to be confused with a mere intellectual assent to the doctrinal teachings of Christianity, though that is obviously necessary. It includes a radical and total commitment to Christ as the Lord of one's life." Other standard references define faith as total commitment. ⁴

⁴ Faith as total commitment is something well known to New Testament scholarship. *Dictionary of the Bible* (John McKenzie, S.J.), article "Faith" (p.268): "The scope of the faith demanded by Isaiah shows that faith was a total commitment to Yahweh, a renunciation of secular and material resources, a seeking of security in the saving will of God alone." *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* begins the article "Faith" as follows: "Faith—a belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for one's life." See also *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, article "Faith, Faithfulness," subarticle "Faith as assent and commitment" (vol.2, pp.416-417).

Apostasy: The form without the substance

Do you see what is happening? The same biblical words are being used in the church but their meanings have been distorted. *Antichrist* is used, *faith* is used, *grace* is used, *church* is used, but their meanings have been twisted.

This brings us to the primary definition of apostasy: Apostasy in the New Testament is a situation in which the form is still there, but the substance or power is gone. In 2 Timothy 3:1–5, Paul describes the apostasy of the last days—the very age in which we now live. In verse 5 he says regarding this apostasy that “*men will be holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power.*” (NASB) The form is still there but there is no inner substance or power.

This situation is not unique to the modern age; it had already started in the first century. Apostasy has been with the church right from the beginning, but only now is the problem getting bigger and bigger. What used to be an isolated problem has now become epidemic. Of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, one was already dead. The church at Sardis still had the form of a church, but to this church the Lord Jesus says, “You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Rev.3:1). With one dead church in Sardis, apostasy had already crept into the early church.

I fear that the problem today is not one dead church out of seven, but the other way around. Out of seven churches today, six may be dead. The problem has reached the point where it now becomes a struggle for spiritual survival in the church, paving the way for the Antichrist. With deception so rampant in the church, the Antichrist can just walk in without attracting much notice. When apostasy is everywhere, what is one more apostate church leader?

When I heard the preaching of Jim Bakker, I compared his message with that of the New Testament, and I knew right away that he was a false teacher who was twisting God's word shamelessly. But look at how many millions of Christians in North America and around the world had been watching his television shows. Look at how much money had been contributed to support that kind of false teaching—to the tune of 127 million U.S. dollars a year! It was not until his adultery was publicized that the television viewers realized that they had been deceived and cheated.

Even if you try to hide your sins or cover them with hush money as Bakker did, sooner or later your sins will find you out (Num. 32:23). Your sins will eventually come out in the open. What you whisper in secret will be proclaimed on the rooftops (Lk.12:3). The apostle John exhorts us to examine the lives of Bible teachers. But even before their sins are exposed, their preaching will give them away. Listen carefully

and with discernment. Unless you have the right equipment or training, you would not be able to discern false preaching.

Most Bible teachers equate apostasy with violent persecution, but I am sure by now that you have arrived at a truly biblical understanding of apostasy. The four aforementioned books on the Antichrist are forced to come up with an unscriptural definition of apostasy because it takes only one false teaching to distort one's understanding of the rest of biblical teaching. If you define the Antichrist as some kind of world dictator, sooner or later you will understand apostasy in terms of violent persecution.

What is the outcome of this? Some people would, as a result, fail to see the relevance of the Antichrist in the present age. When they see no persecution around them, and when there is little prospect of a world dictator in the near future, they may wonder why I am preaching my seventh message on the Antichrist. They have been misled because they have been told that persecution is the key characteristic of apostasy.

But the Bible tells us that apostasy had already started in the church even from the first century. Today the church is still flourishing; the form is still there; the cross is still a prominent symbol; Bible terms are still being used—*but the power is gone.*

Anyone who looks at the New Testament church would know it is different from the churches today. Anyone who has read the book of Acts, even superficially, would see a vibrant church filled with the joy and spiritual power that are lacking in the churches today. The early church was neither a social club nor a community center but a fellowship of Spirit-filled people among whom God's power was so mightily demonstrated that many unbelievers stood at a distance from them and held them in high esteem (Acts 5:13).

As there has been persecution all through history, there will be persecution in the future. The future persecution will, in fact, be far worse than any past persecution (Mt.24:21). But persecution is not the primary meaning of apostasy in the New Testament. Apostasy in the New Testament is having the form without the substance.

If any professing Christian is living in sin, he is no better than the church at Sardis even though he may carry a Bible, wear a cross, and go to church. Like the dead church in Sardis which had the name of being alive, this churchgoer has the name of Christian. But he is an apostate as far as the Bible is concerned. There are of course different degrees of apostasy in the church. So the question is to what extent have you apostatized? To what extent have you twisted the Bible to your liking? Many people buy books on the promises of God, but when they try to claim the promises, nothing happens. So they wonder why God doesn't keep his word. They don't

realize that attached to every promise are conditions which must be fulfilled before the promise is granted. Yet I don't see any conditions being stated in these books of promises. A big lie is being perpetrated. Yes, the Bible has many wonderful promises, but if you preach the promises without mentioning the conditions, you are preaching a lie and furthering apostasy in the church.

The Old Testament warns us of apostasy

Apostasy is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. Countless Israelites perished in the wilderness because of apostasy. Do we have eyes to see? The Old Testament was written as a warning to us (1 Cor. 10:11). As I warn myself, so I warn you: *apostasy will send more Christians to hell than anything else*. Dr. Montgomery is right. You will be damned through the church if you live in apostasy.

How did Israel apostatize? It all started when God saved Israel out of the land of Egypt. The Lord did something so amazing that many Bible scholars are still baffled by it: he parted the Red Sea so that Israel was able to cross the sea on dry land. But when the Egyptians tried to cross the sea in pursuit, the walls of water closed in on them and they drowned. This was a mighty display of God's grace, power

and salvation. The crossing of the Red Sea is even a symbol of baptism (1 Cor.10:1–2).

God then led Israel into the wilderness, where he miraculously provided his people with manna from heaven and water from a rock. Again and again they experienced God's glorious salvation—as have some Christians—but soon apostasy started to creep in. Their hearts turned back to Egypt and they started to grumble against God: "Why has God brought us into the wilderness? It was so much better in Egypt! There we had garlic, leeks and onions. There we had abundant water for a nice bath. There we had shelter from the sun, but now we're roasting in the wilderness!" They were also angry with Moses: "You brought us out of Egypt to let us die in the wilderness!"

Israel's apostasy began when the people grumbled about life in the wilderness, and wanted to return to Egypt. Similarly, apostasy for many Christians begins right after their baptism when they discover that life is not so rosy in the wilderness. Then they want to return to the world which they had forsaken at baptism.

What is your attitude towards God?

When God appeared on Mount Sinai and gave Moses the Ten Commandments, fire and billowing smoke engulfed the mountain. The fiery spectacle struck terror in the hearts of

the Israelites, but something even more terrifying happened: *God spoke!* The people cried out to Moses, “Don’t let God speak to us or we will die! He is too holy and demanding! He gives us not one but ten commandments! Have some mercy on us! We’re only flesh and blood!”

The Israelites were even afraid of Moses because his face shone with glory after he had spoken with God at Sinai. Moses had to veil his face when he spoke with the people, and they kept a distance from him (Ex. 34:29–35; 2 Cor. 3:7,13).

The Israelites eventually turned away from God and worshipped the heathen gods which they found less terrifying. The history of Israel is a history of idolatry. The Israelites were sacrificing to other gods at the heathen altars which in the Old Testament are called “the high places,” yet they were still going to the temple to worship the true God Yahweh. In Jerusalem, just outside the hostel where I stayed, you can still see the remains of a high place dating from the Old Testament period. Interestingly, the sacrificial altar is within close walking distance of the Lord’s temple. How convenient! After worshipping God at the temple, you can walk over to the high place and sacrifice to other gods at the heathen altars!

Apostasy in Israel—and apostasy in the church today—started on a small scale, then it grew bigger and bigger. At the height of Israel’s apostasy, God sent his prophets to warn Israel of the punishment awaiting them, but the people hated

them all the more for speaking against them. The Israelites rejected the true God and pursued other gods because these gods gave them a sweeter deal: “Believe in me for a good harvest, burn incense to me for more money, offer me a sacrifice for good fortunes.” Unlike the God of Israel, these heathen gods never demanded holiness. Idolatry spread even to the priestly class. The great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel condemned the priests who were ministering at the temple, and denounced them as false teachers. The confrontation between the two sides was often between one lone prophet and thousand of priests in Israel.

Compromising with sin will destroy you in the end

I have pointed out that sin and temptation are a far greater danger than persecution. Be forewarned that apostasy comes from compromising with sin in the life of the church. If we allow a little room for the flesh, a little room for the self, a little room for pride, a little room for worldliness, the dreadful consequences will surely come.

Compromise always seems harmless in the beginning. In the Church of England, whenever a minister steps up to the pulpit, he would wear the traditional black gown and academic hood adorned with purple, red or scarlet. His collar

makes him look authoritative, unlike the lowly preacher who wears a shirt and tie. But where, I ask, does this academic hood come from? From the Bible? Certainly not! From secular institutions? That's right! Why then are we wearing these things in the church? You see, we have imported a little bit of the world into the church. It all seems harmless in the beginning, then it gets bigger and bigger. The preacher puts on his academic hood because it is a public attestation to his academic qualifications and therefore his authority to preach. But Peter and the other apostles had no academic hood. They preached by one authority: the power of the Holy Spirit and the vindication of a godly life.

Even if you allow a small measure of sin, temptation, and the things of the world to come into your life, in the end you will apostatize and face destruction. And your attending church will only add to your condemnation. Let me therefore close with a parable to help you understand this.

The parable of the eagle

If you ever visit Canada or the United States, it would be worthwhile to visit the Niagara Falls to catch a breathtaking view of the world's most famous waterfall, particularly in winter when everything is frozen and covered with glistening ice and snow. Huge icicles form along the edges all the

way down to the falls. In summer, millions of tons of water rush down the falls, thundering to the depths below. You can even go on a boat and get close enough to feel the turbulent mist whipped up by the falls, an awesome display of God's creation.

One bitter cold day in early spring, an eagle was hovering above Niagara Falls in search of food. The Canadian winter had been long and harsh, and food was hard to come by. The eagle's eyes caught sight of a sheep's carcass floating down the river towards the falls. Much of the frozen carcass was embedded in a block of ice, but a portion of the flesh was exposed. The famished eagle swooped down on the ice block, and began to devour the flesh. Eagles usually prey on live animals, but I suppose that if an eagle is hungry enough, it might go for a well-preserved carcass.

While the eagle was eating the dead sheep, the roaring of the falls grew louder and louder. The eagle took a glance and said to itself, "No problem! There's still time for a few more bites. Then I'll soar into the heavens!" After taking a few more bites, the eagle looked again and saw the mist of the falls. But it was not afraid because it had powerful, muscular wings. So it took a few more bites. From afar the people were watching this majestic eagle standing on the ice block, and were wondering what it was going to do next. At the precise moment, when the block reached the edge, the eagle spread its

powerful wings. *But it couldn't fly!* Its talons were frozen into the ice. The eagle tumbled down the Niagara and perished.

Temptation starts with a legitimate need that gradually leads to greed and gluttony. Then it's too late. That is the downfall for many Christians. The great apostasy has come into the church because of her failure to resist temptation. May we be victorious by God's grace and power.

Chapter 8

The Antichrist: Judgment Upon the Church

The aim of our messages on the Antichrist is to prepare our hearts for what must happen soon. We are close to the end, as anyone who is sensitive to the Lord and to what is happening in the world must realize. In these messages I have not resorted to sensationalism which, unfortunately, has plagued this subject, whether in books or in sermons. I am not concerned with sensationalism, but with what the word of God has to say to us. I am concerned with the attitude of our hearts, and how we ought to prepare for these events which are now imminent.

In my past messages I have spoken about the resurrection and the Antichrist, and the cross and the Antichrist. Now I come to another subject, and it is one that weighs heavily on my heart. In fact it weighs on me like a burden, causing much grief in my heart. I have been pondering how, by the Lord's grace, I will be able to share this burden with you.

Why does God even allow the Antichrist to appear?

The question that must occur to any thinking person is this: Why would God even allow the Antichrist—this dreadful and abominable figure—to appear at all? Why does the Lord allow evil to come to such a head in the last days, and in such a way as to bring disaster upon the church? This is indeed a disaster for the church, both because of the deception that will ravage the church (the apostasy mentioned in Thessalonians) and because of the dreadful persecution that will affect each one of us—that is, those of us who remain faithful to the gospel.

Why would God allow the Antichrist to appear at all? Have you ever thought about it? This question is part of the wider question of why God allows evil to occur at all. I won't go into a philosophical discourse on the subject. I only want to address the question: Why doesn't God cut down the Antichrist before he could ever become the awful person that indeed he will be?

In the early church, when Ananias and Sapphira sinned by lying to the Holy Spirit and to the leaders of the church—Peter in particular—they were instantly cut down (Acts 5). So why doesn't God likewise cause the Antichrist to drop dead so that he won't become the harm, the hurt, indeed the destruction of the church in the last days of this age? What is the answer to this question? Why doesn't God safeguard his

church from the unbearable situation of apostasy from within, and persecution from without? He only needs to cut down the Antichrist. Then I won't even have to preach on this topic!

The Antichrist: God's judgment upon the church

If you think about it, and search through the word of God, you would find in Scripture only one plausible answer to this question. But I fear it is an answer that we won't like to hear. But if you have a better answer, please let me know.

We have seen from John's first and second letters that the Antichrist doesn't come from outside the church, but from *within* the church. We have also seen that he will be the leader of the great apostasy. For those who refuse to join the apostasy, the Antichrist will bring upon them such persecution that they will be forced to make a choice: apostatize or die. Brothers and sisters, my dear ones in the Lord, here we are not talking about theory, for this will affect every one of us. You must decide between bearing the mark of the beast (the Antichrist) and bearing the mark of Christ. Neutrality, or sitting on the fence, or taking the middle-of-the-road position, will not be an option for anyone. You will either apostatize and save your skin, or die and become an end-time martyr. Then the words of the Lord will take on unprecedented significance: "Whoever finds his life will lose

it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt.10:39).

But our question remains: Why doesn't God cut down the Antichrist? The answer is quite simply this: *God will use the Antichrist to bring judgment on the church.* This is the heavy burden that I was talking about. We know that God will judge unbelievers, but we are less familiar with the fact that *God will judge the church.* This truth is foreign to us because we are often taught to believe that *the church will never be judged.* So let us see whether this preconception is grounded in the Scriptures.

The Bible is God's message to whom?

Most of you have a Bible in your hands, and have you ever noticed one astonishing fact? There are 66 books in the Bible: 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. Yet none of these 66 books is addressed to unbelievers! Have you ever thought of that? Not one book!

The Old Testament was addressed to the covenant people of God, to Israel, a people whom God had brought into a relationship with himself through the old covenant. Every one of the 39 books of the Old Testament speaks to the covenant people of God.

We have 27 books in the New Testament and not one of them is specifically addressed to unbelievers. The gospels

are a record of what Jesus taught the disciples and believers. He did not speak to Gentile unbelievers except in passing conversations. Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus spoke to the Jews, the people of God who stood in a covenant relationship with God. Some portions of the book of Acts record messages spoken to unbelievers, but the book as a whole is not addressed to them. In fact it is addressed to one called Theophilus, whose name means “one who loves God”.

The Bible was not written directly to unbelievers. So if you are a Christian, every book of the Bible is speaking specifically to you.

But if that is the case, how can the message of salvation ever reach the unbelievers? The answer in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is that the message is conveyed to them through God’s people. If you are a Christian, you are God’s message to the world. It is your life that is meant to speak to the world. Isaiah 42:6 says, “And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations” (NASB). Isaiah 49:6 says, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth.”

These same words apply to the New Testament church, as Paul and Barnabas explained to their listeners their reason for preaching the gospel:

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 13:47, ESV)

Has the church succeeded where Israel failed?

The church picked up the torch which Israel dropped. Israel failed to be the light of the world and a glory to God. Paul said to them, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Romans 2:24). Israel failed again and again. Twice the temple was destroyed. The people of God—the Jews—went into exile and were scattered all over the world. They lost their nationhood and vanished for a long time—yet were preserved by God’s merciful hand for the latter days. So it was left to the church, consisting of Jewish and Gentile believers, to take up the role of being light to the world, though over the centuries the Jewish believers became fewer and fewer in the church, and the Gentiles predominated in the churches throughout the world. Just as Israel was to be a light to the Gentiles, the church was to be a light to the world.

Israel failed to be the light of the world, but has the church succeeded where Israel failed? In all honesty, can you and I say that the church of God, as it has been in the world for the past two millennia right up to the present, is a glory to God?

That it shines gloriously like the sun that shines in the darkness of the world?

Jesus says to his disciples, “You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt.5:14,16). Paul says to the churches, “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” (Eph.5:8) But has the church been glorifying God? As a pastor, I have to admit that if the church is the glory of God and the light of the world, it is hard to see the light and the glory. I think most pastors throughout the world would agree with me, as do most non-Christians.

There have been outstanding individuals in both the Old and the New Testaments. There are still outstanding Christians today, but they are few. The church as a whole, we must say with a heavy heart, has for the most part been an utter disgrace to the name of God. And the words which were spoken of Israel—“the name of God has been blasphemed among the nations because of you”—apply to the church today, do they not?

For many years I did not want to be a Christian despite having studied at a missionary school. I also went to church from time to time as an unbeliever. And what I saw there made me sick.

God's name is blasphemed because of the church. Where is the witness of the church? Let us not mince our words, or soften the blow. Whenever I read church history, my heart is heavy. Read it for yourself. Apart from some martyrs and outstanding people, the story of the church is one of internal conflict and power struggles; of competing for status, position, and riches; of playing politics. We are familiar with that tedious story. So when I ask with a heavy heart *Why does God allow the Antichrist to appear?* the answer is for judgment upon the church.

History from God's point of view

Let me give you a quick survey of the history that is recorded for us in the Scriptures. In the past two days I have been meditating upon this matter, trying to look at history from God's point of view. And in my heart there is nothing but heaviness. Can we try to move away from man's point of view and look at things from God's point of view? Try to read the Bible, which is God's book, from God's standpoint.

In the next few minutes, I will try to paint a picture as seen from God's point of view. Let's go back to the Garden of Eden. God created Adam and Eve for them to have fellowship with him, and that God's glory may be manifested in them. But what happened? It didn't take long for Adam and Eve to succumb to pride and selfishness. Then God's initial plan for

fellowship with them—as exemplified in his walking with them in the garden in the cool of the day—was dashed. That dismal history continues through Genesis. We don't have to go far into the Bible, just six chapters, to read that God was “sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Genesis 6:6).

Can you look into God's heart and feel what he feels? God had made man and woman perfect and beautiful. He gave them a wonderful environment and even his own Presence for fellowship. Yet within the first six chapters of Genesis, mankind had fallen utterly into sin, corruption, disobedience, and bloodshed. And it grieved God in his heart.

Then came the great flood that wiped out all corruption in order to give humankind a new start. Of the entire world population, only eight people emerged from the flood. Noah and his family were the only righteous people left.

Later in history, one man arose in the midst of the darkness: Abraham. Finally there was a man who walked with God, and who gave mankind new hope and a new beginning. But after Abraham, it was downhill all the way.

Even the story of Jacob cannot be read except with deep reservations. Here was a man who got his blessings by deceit, and whose conduct leaves so many question marks in our minds. When you lead a Bible study on Genesis, one particular question would often be asked: Why did God bless a

man like Jacob? This presents us with a genuine problem, so we try to steer around the question and defend Jacob to the best of our ability.

So the situation goes downhill until one more bright light appeared on the scene. Praise God for Moses. Finally there was a man with whom God spoke face to face (Exodus 33:11). How God longed to find such a man upon the face of the earth. And God used Moses to lead his people out of bondage in Egypt. Moses led over two million Israelites out of Egypt into a new land, the land of promise.

Yet God said of them, "For forty years I have been grieved by this stiff-necked, rebellious and disobedient people who complain all the time. I have shown them miracle after miracle, and saved them by my great power, and all I get is grumbling." (cf. Psalms 78 and 95)

A journey from Egypt to the land of promise would have taken only forty days, yet it took them forty years. As you read on in the Bible, the dismal situation of God's people continues to decline, with a few bright lights here and there like Joshua.

Judgment is as much a promise of God as blessing

Israel went down and down. The very people who were supposed to be the light of the world ended up being destroyed. To be sure, there was for a while the bright light of David. His life had blemishes but at least it was still a bright spot in the darkening history.

In 721 BC, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed. The people in the kingdom did not heed the voices of the prophets who had warned them of God's judgment coming upon his people. "Impossible!" they said, "for God will never judge his people. He is always faithful to his covenant and to his promises."

Brothers and sisters, let me tell you something: *Judgment is as much a promise of God as is blessing*. Did you get that? Judgment is God's promise to those among his people who disobey him. If you are a Christian and you disobey God, he promises to judge you.

If you visit a Christian bookstore, you will find books on the promises of God, but these tell you only the blessings and not the judgments. *These books are not faithful to the word of God*.

Anyone who has visited Israel would know about Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. It was at these two mountains that Israel was told to choose between the curses and the blessings. Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 give a detailed

account of the curses proclaimed at Ebal and the blessings at Gerizim. This arrangement had already been decreed earlier, in chapter 11:

Today, look, I am offering you a blessing and a curse: a blessing, if you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God which I enjoin on you today; a curse, if you disobey the commandments of Yahweh your God and leave the way which today I have marked out for you, by following other gods hitherto unknown to you. And when Yahweh your God has brought you into the country which you are about to enter and make your own, you must set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. (Deut.11:26-29, NJB)

God said to his people: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live." (Dt.30:19) Hence judgment is as much a promise of God as a blessing, if God is to be faithful to his character.

What happened to Israel and Judah?

The people of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, kept on saying that God will never judge his people. Wrong! They were not listening to the prophets sent by God. These true prophets

were the few bright lights that remained. They were the final prophets in the last days of Israel, but they were outnumbered by false prophets by a ratio of hundreds to one. To the people, the majority is always right.

Micaiah son of Imlah was one such prophet against 400 false prophets who opposed his prophetic messages (1 Kings 22). Those are hopeless odds. Why would you listen to one person when 400 say the exact opposite? But they did not listen to the true prophet, and so the Northern Kingdom was eventually destroyed.

The Southern Kingdom did not learn any lessons from what had happened to the Northern Kingdom, and similarly refused to listen to Jeremiah's message of judgment. God said of them, "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." (Jer.6:14; 8:11) The false prophets are described in the following passage:

"Ah, Lord Yahweh," I answered, "here are the prophets telling them, 'You will not see the sword, famine will not touch you; I promise you true peace in this place.'" Then Yahweh said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I have not sent them, I gave them no orders, I never spoke to them. Delusive visions, hollow predictions, daydreams of their own, that is what they prophesy to you." (Jeremiah 14:13-14, NJB)

The people were saying to Jeremiah, “Look at all these prophets who are saying, ‘Peace and safety, peace and safety’. So why are you telling us there will be destruction? God will never judge his people. Don’t you see the Temple standing in our midst? Israel, the Northern Kingdom, didn’t have one, but we have the Temple and therefore God’s presence in Jerusalem. God will never allow his Temple to be destroyed because that would dishonor his name.”

Yet Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned them that the Temple will be destroyed. Judgment will come, and the city which is called by God’s name will be destroyed. But they did not listen to the warnings. “How dare you say such a thing? This is blasphemy!” So the prophet Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern, and he nearly died there (Jer. 38:6–13). In 587–586 BC, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was destroyed by the Babylonians.

God promises to judge you if your life does not speak to the non-Christians

You might say, “That’s the Old Testament. We are living under the New Testament, and stand in a new covenant with God. So the church will never be judged.” Doesn’t that sound familiar? We hear this again and again in the churches today.

“You and I will never come under judgment.” If that is what you believe, you had best read your Bible in 1 Peter 4:17. Let this verse sink into your hearts, brothers and sisters. What does the apostle Peter say here? “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (NASB)

This household of God is the church, as seen in 1 Timothy 3:15, “the household of God, which is the church of the living God.”

Brothers and sisters, let this message sink into your ears, as Isaiah said, “Let the deaf hear and the blind see” (Isaiah 42:18). I am speaking to Christians when I say that judgment will begin with the church. I am speaking to Christians because the only way to speak to non-Christians is through the Christians. Every book in the Bible speaks to Christians, and it is through Christians that God speaks to non-Christians. *If your life does not speak to the non-Christians—if God cannot speak to them through you—let me tell you, brothers and sisters, that God will judge you.* I would be a false prophet like those in Israel if I did not tell you the vital truth that God promises to judge you. It is a promise of God. That is why this message is heavy and painful.

Why did judgment begin with the early church?

I find the statement in 1 Peter 4:17 utterly astonishing for a few reasons. First, why would Peter say that the sufferings and persecutions coming upon the church of his day, the early church, were to be taken as judgment? This is surprising, for we regard the church in Peter's day, the early church, as a model for us. We feel that the early church surely wouldn't do anything worthy of judgment. So how can Peter say that judgment begins with us?

Here we see the difference in attitude between us and the early church. Peter saw that the early church was imperfect and had failings. And he thanked God for the persecutions by which the church could be purified. He thanked God that the sins within the early church could be judged.

If you take the rosy specs off your eyes, and look at the New Testament record, you will see that the New Testament does not hide the sins that are committed in the church. It tells us of Ananias and Sapphira who lied, and were judged instantly with death (Acts 5). It doesn't gloss over the things that were going on in the church, but tells of them, e.g., the partisan conflicts ("I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ," 1Cor.1:12; 3:4) and the spiritual pride of those who say, "We possess spiritual gifts; we speak in tongues, and are superior to other Christians".

The New Testament does not hide the ugly conduct in the early church, but tells us of the Galatians who taught that we need something more than Christ for salvation, namely, circumcision and the keeping of the Law—in addition to Christ (Gal.5:4). So some Gentiles thought they had to be like the Jews and be circumcised. The New Testament also tells us of the Colossians who worship angels (Col.2:18). There is also Demas who abandoned Paul and went back to enjoy the world (2 Tim.4:10). There is Simon Magus, a baptized magician, who did his share of mischief in the early church (Acts 8).

And there was the lack of love, so much so that James had to rebuke the church:

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2–4, ESV)

But we look at the early church with rosy specs, don't we? We think that the early church was wonderful, yet they had their failings. So Peter says that God's judgment begins with

the household of God, the church (1 Peter 4:17). The next verse says, “But if it is with *difficulty* that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?” (v.18, NASB).

God will cut us off if we do not fulfill our task

I have just painted for you the picture that God sees. Whether in the Old Testament or the New, God is looking for faithful people. It brings tears to our eyes that it is as hard today as in the New Testament age for God to find somebody who walks with him. This was also true of the Old Testament age. The history of the Old Testament had been dark, so it is our hope that under the new covenant, in which we are given the power of the Holy Spirit to live victoriously, there would be multitudes today who walk with God.

But how many people do you know in the church of whom you could say with confidence that they walk with God? Can you give me a few names? And do you walk with God? Would you be able to give an honest answer if the Lord Jesus looks you in the eye and asks, “Are you walking with me in this new covenant through the gift of the Holy Spirit?” If not, then you are the reason why judgment is coming upon the church, and the reason why God will allow the Antichrist to bring destruction upon the church, just as God allowed king Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Judah.

The time of the Gentiles is fast going by, and we ought to heed Paul's warning to Christians:

²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. (Romans 11:20–22, ESV)

Let verse 21 sink into your minds: *God will not spare you if you do not fulfill the commission given to you.* We are not saved just to get ourselves to heaven. This self-centered gospel in which we save our own spiritual skins is the root of much of this disease. But we are saved in order to bear fruit to the glory of God, as the Lord Jesus says in John 15. Those who do not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire (v.6). This is the plain message of the Lord no matter how you try to interpret it.

God will not spare you or me if we fail to fulfill our task. Don't sit there comfortably and say, "I am saved by the blood of Jesus. All I have to do is wait for my reserved seat in heaven". Unless you fulfill the task entrusted to you, unless you shine as light for God, you will have no seat waiting for

you in heaven. We need to get out of that delusion. You were once darkness but you have been transformed by the Holy Spirit to become a light that shines wherever you go.

In the world today, where are those who walk with God and shine with God's glory and beauty such that others come to their light? "And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." (Isa.60:3) Do they come to your light? Are they attracted by God's glory in your life?

I stand back and look at the sad history of God's people, and wonder what God is thinking to himself. "I created man. I have given him everything, not even sparing my Son. What more can I give?"

Yahweh's eyes run to and fro through the whole earth, looking for somebody who will walk with him (2 Chron.16:9). But where will he find such people? The church has been unfaithful, and Gentiles blaspheme God's name because of the church. Yet there are still a few faithful ones. Will you be among them?

Chapter 9

Sin, Satan, and the Antichrist

We come to the ninth message on the Antichrist. In this series I have been touching on topics such as resurrection and the Antichrist, the cross and the Antichrist, and judgment and the Antichrist. These could be the headings of a systematic theology, but I have used the Antichrist as a foil to bring in all these important themes which are taught in the word of God. Today's subject will come under the theme, "Sin, Satan, and the Antichrist."

Satan doesn't like this message

Satan must have been observing me as I was meditating and writing my notes in preparation for this message. And seeing my notes, he probably didn't like what he saw, so he decided to give me a hard time in an attempt to weaken me. It is something I welcome. I have been at war with Satan for a

long time, and I am familiar with his tactics. Last night he began his familiar tactic of loud banging noise, and it went on for a few hours. The banging was so loud that if you stood in the washroom you would get a headache. I don't know if it was from upstairs or downstairs, because when I stood outside the door of the upstairs apartment to see where the banging was coming from, the noise suddenly stopped. Or perhaps it was from the downstairs apartment, with somebody banging on the ceiling. I went to the downstairs apartment and stood outside, but there was no banging. The door was shut, so the people inside could not have seen me coming. Remarkably, when I returned to our apartment, the banging resumed. I went out for a walk and heard the banging from outside. I looked at the apartment building but not locate the source of the banging. It went on to nearly 11 pm, and our daughter Grace complained that it was giving her a headache. I said to myself, "Satan and I have been fighting for a long time, and he is back to his old games again".

By 11 o'clock all was quiet, so I got on with my work, and later went off to sleep. But it looks like Satan was getting more displeased with my notes, for I was awakened by fierce banging this morning. I looked at my watch, and I had barely slept four hours, for Satan was determined I won't get any more than that. I thought, "If I can't sleep, I will use the time for prayer and quietness." There is no situation, not even loud banging noise, that can stop us from praying. The

banging went on for half an hour, by which time I was wide awake and there was no more question of going back to sleep. I went into the living room, and found my daughter sitting there wide awake. She is usually a sound sleeper, but this time she got up and read a devotional book. I am happy that today's message is not going to please my enemy. So let us get on with it, and you may see why he is not pleased.

Be alert to Satan's activities

As I shared some time ago, in my student days in London we had an Easter conference. It was a small conference with around fifty people, but we experienced such a mighty working of the Spirit that none of us there could ever forget the experience. God's presence could be felt and experienced in such a remarkable way that unless you have experienced this kind of God's presence, it would be impossible for me to describe it to you. Immediately after this remarkable experience of God's presence and of the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst, I knew that the old enemy, Satan, was going to attack. As one of the leaders of the church, I warned the church: "God has worked in our midst in an amazing way as we have experienced. But watch carefully and you will see how Satan will attack over the next few weeks or months."

Recently I was looking through my old files, and found my notes with the title, "Observations on the activities of Satan". In this little booklet I noted every activity of Satan in the church, case after case of his attacks carried out over the two or three months immediately after God's amazing work among us. Since I was one of the younger leaders of the church, these cases were constantly being reported to me as they occurred, and I wrote them down. I am familiar with the enemy's devices and strategies, and I am happy that he considers me a target worthy of attack.

Is Satan real to you? For some people, God is not very real, and neither is Satan. That is unfortunate because nothing is so dangerous as to be attacked by an enemy and not know it. This morning as the banging carried on, I was thinking of what Satan has been doing in the two years I have been in Hong Kong. I thought about the time we first came to Hong Kong and stayed in Siu Lik Yuen. My wife and my daughter arrived a month earlier than I, and had been looking for an apartment. Helen is cautious, knowing that Satan finds me a particularly interesting target. So in looking for an apartment, she checked out the surroundings to make sure that no building work was going on. Everything in Siu Lik Yuen looked fine, so we moved in. Not long afterwards, they cleared a plot of land not far away, and began driving piles into the ground for a new building. If you live in Hong Kong, you would be familiar with the incessant banging and

shaking that occur when steel piles are driven into the ground. The pile-driving machine goes zoom-bang, zoom-bang, all day long.

Then I flew to Singapore when the church there got started. I learned over the phone that the church, by God's grace, was growing numerically and spiritually. When I arrived in Singapore, they took me to the apartment where I was to stay. That place was quiet and peaceful, at least in the first few days. But after that, someone decided to change the water tank on the roof. The tank happened to be directly above my room on the top floor. For two weeks, the banging was so loud that my table was shaking, and my head too. My old enemy followed me everywhere, even to Singapore.

After all that banging in Singapore, I returned to Hong Kong for a short while before heading off to Israel. In Hong Kong we stayed in Siu Lik Yuen again, and guess what? The upstairs apartment was being renovated.

In Israel, I stayed in brother Johann's apartment. It was peaceful for the first few days, then suddenly the enemy mobilized his forces and it was time for the upstairs apartment to do some renovation. The drilling went on for the whole time I was there. Wherever I go, there would be some noisy work—banging, renovating, knocking down walls—that begins shortly after my arrival, and it would go on for

months, and always right above the apartment where I was staying.

When I returned to Hong Kong from Israel, we stayed for a few months at an apartment on Prince Edward Road. You guessed it. Again they were in the process of building an apartment block right behind us. One would think that in such a crowded and developed area, they wouldn't build anything, yet they were either renovating an old building or building a new one. The noise and banging accompanied us for most of the three months we were staying at Prince Edward.

Then we moved to Shatin. Once again Helen surveyed the area carefully, checked the adjacent apartments, upstairs and downstairs. Everything was fine. But over the past few months, there would be someone upstairs or downstairs or next door doing some renovating, drilling, banging, and knocking things down. Our next-door neighbor moved out three months ago, so renovation was also taking place there for the last three months.

All this continued over a period of two whole years! If you think it's just coincidence, that is doubtful. By definition, something that happens regularly is no longer a coincidence. A coincidence, by definition, is something that happens unexpectedly and out of the normal pattern. Anything that happens regularly over two years is no longer a coincidence,

especially when you move from place to place, and check out each place in advance.

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one

Let me start with 1 John 5:19: “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” (ESV) It is the second part of this verse that I would like to impress upon your minds: “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”.

Let me make clear that all the people who had been knocking and banging these two years had no malicious intent whatsoever, not in the least. We have nothing against each other. Their knocking and banging was not any deliberate design on their part.

Yet there is a power that has been orchestrating this entire performance without any of the individuals realizing that they were being used to attack a servant of God, albeit a lowly servant. None of them was aware of it, and they are entirely blameless in this matter. Nonetheless, they were orchestrated and coordinated to carry out this program of attack in terms of loud disturbance. This is the point: the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

It is precisely because Satan is in control of the world that he can orchestrate it. He can use you for his purposes

without your knowing that you are being used. If you are in the power of the evil one, you are under the power of sin, and you will be used by Satan to cause harm which you do not intend. You have no malicious intent, yet you are unwillingly and unwittingly a tool in Satan's hands—unless you are in Christ.

The Bible makes it clear that there are only two possibilities: you are in Christ, or you are in the evil one. To be in Christ is to be a genuine Christian. But a nominal Christian is not in Christ; so he is a more dangerous tool of Satan than even a non-Christian. He may have the name of "Christian" but he is still living under the power of the evil one, under the power of sin. In the Bible, a Christian who lives like a non-Christian is worse than a non-Christian. Unless you are a genuine Christian—one who is truly in Christ, lives by God's power, and walks with the living God—you are in the power of the evil one.

You are either in Christ or in Satan. This is something that you know to be true from experience, and not just because the Bible says so. The words of the Bible are true not just because they are found in a book called the Bible, but also because we experience them to be true. You must be under no illusions as to where you stand. At this very moment, every one of you in this meeting hall is either in Christ (and you know it) or in Satan, in the power of the evil one (and you probably don't know it). That is the fearful thing about being

in the power of the evil one—you might not think you are in his power. You can live your whole life in his power and not know it. It is like having a cancer in your body that is killing you, but you don't know about it until it is too late.

Sin and Satan have everything to do with the Antichrist:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [the day of the Lord's coming] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. (2Thess. 2:3, NASB)

Here the Antichrist is called “the man of lawlessness” or, in a few versions, “the man of sin”. He rejects God's law both outwardly and in his heart. He doesn't live under anyone's control, much less under God's control. In the same the chapter, we see how he functions:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

(2 Thessalonians 2:9–10, ESV)

Some people are excited about the days ahead in which we will see signs and wonders. If you want to see miracles, Satan will oblige you, with miracles manifested through the man of sin.

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. How did this situation come about? How did you come to be in the power of the evil one without your knowing it? The answer is simple: *sin*. Sin offers pleasures, excitement, and enjoyment. We would not sin if sin offered no enjoyments. Is there anyone here who doesn't really know what sin is, or have never sinned? There is not one person in this hall who doesn't know from experience what sin is. Even if you don't know what Satan is in your experience, you certainly know what sin is, for you have experienced its power. And who is behind that power? Satan! He is an undercover agent of the highest order, who makes James Bond pale in comparison. Satan is like an undercover agent who works without being identified, even disguising himself as an angel of light (2Cor.11:14).

Every government is frightened of undercover people who operate within their ranks. The communists in China know this very well. I saw the communists come into China, and those who yelled communist slogans the loudest may well be Kuomintang agents or people hostile to the communists. They are the ones who waved the flag most fervently, or shouted "Long live Mao Zedong!" the loudest. The communists are not ignorant of this tactic, yet the problem remains: How do you tell that a person is an enemy agent? At the self-examination sessions, he may confess to not loving Mao Zedong as he ought, and exhorts his comrades to repent of

this error. And to complicate matters, he may be a longtime member of the Communist Party.

Every government knows that it is not the enemy outside who is the most dangerous—the one who holds a machine gun and yells slogans against you. Rather, it is the enemy from within—the one who yells slogans in your support—who is the most dangerous. This is the situation we will face with the Antichrist. I have said many times that the greatest danger to the church is not a person who openly fights against Christ. An Antichrist who is merely a contra Christ is not a real danger to us. The greatest danger is the pseudo Christ, the false teacher within the church who has all the appearance of holiness.

Paul warns the Corinthians that if they should see an angel of light shining in their midst, be careful, for he could well be Satan. Does sin always display itself as something ugly? Have you ever seen what some criminals look like? They are suave gentlemen. Their hair is groomed, they use expensive perfumes, they wear elegant ties, and they are courteous. They never dirty their hands, leaving the dirty work to their minions to carry out. Have you ever seen how difficult it is to bring a mafia boss to court? The FBI, for all their investigative efforts, have great difficulty getting them to trial.

This is what we need to understand about Satan and the Antichrist. Those who teach that the Antichrist will be a

world dictator who persecutes the church are teaching contrary to Scripture. The greatest danger to the church is an antichrist who operates from within the church.

Similarly, Satan makes sin attractive to sinners. Preachers often portray sin as something terrible and repulsive. Sin is indeed ugly and repulsive to God, but when is sin ever ugly and repulsive to the sinner? We don't see things from God's point of view, so it takes a spiritual man to see things the way God sees them.

Three Reasons Why Sin is Attractive

1. You get something for nothing

Let us consider the case of a thief, and look at things from his point of view. If you tell him that stealing is bad and harms the victim, do you think he cares? He doesn't care if it is bad for others so long as it is good for him. From the sinner's point of view, sin is attractive. Stealing is attractive because you want to get something for nothing. That is the philosophy of the world. It is the thinking that drives lottery tickets. You pay two dollars to win a million; that's as close as you can get to gaining a lot for nothing. In this world, if you can get

something for nothing, you are smart. That is the whole point of stealing.

2. Sinning involves skills we take pride in

Example: Pickpocketing

The second attractive thing about stealing is the skill required. Just as a craftsman takes pride in his craftsmanship, so the thief takes pride in his techniques. If we are caught stealing, it is because we are not skillful. We may be clumsy, or our hands are too slow. The skills of Hong Kong pickpockets are impressive, and they work with lightning speed. When I go on a bus, I am cautious not to take too much money with me. But despite my cautiousness, I once boarded a bus with one hundred dollars in my pocket, and got off without the hundred dollars. The pickpocket didn't even cut my pocket. It was pure skill, and I take my hat off to him. Skill is the second attractive thing about stealing.

Example: Robbery

Do you know how hard it is to rob a bank? You may end up in jail before you can get two dollars across the counter. You have to plan the robbery with the precision of a military operation. In some movies, an American military mission

would hire professional criminals to help their commandos pull off a hostage rescue operation. That's because the conventionally trained military people lack some of the skills that criminals possess. The criminals know how to pull off a bank robbery, and such skills can be put to good use for a military operation. We could use a few people like that in our church, to carry out gospel outreach operations.

Sin is attractive when you get something for nothing, but also when it requires skill and precision. You might not be committing sin on a grand scale like theft or robbery, but think of the sins you have committed. You committed them for the same reasons, to get something for nothing or to prove to yourself that you are clever.

Example: Seduction

I once asked a sister why she had committed a particular sin. Everyone thought she was a nice Christian, but one day she came to me and confessed that she had committed fornication. I looked at her in disbelief. A Bible study leader, an active Christian committing fornication? And she knew the consequences. I said to her, "I want to ask you one question. Why did you commit the sin?" She said, "I wanted to prove to myself that I am still attractive to men, and am capable of seducing them through my charm and attractiveness." I said, "And that's why you committed fornication?" "Yes." Then I

said, “Do you know the consequences of such a sin in the church?” She said, “I would like you to deal with me in whatever way is necessary to free me from the terrible bondage of sin I have come under.” I asked, “Do you really see the seriousness of this sin?” She said yes.

It all started as something enjoyable and exciting. She wanted to prove to herself that she could seduce a man she wanted by her skill and attractiveness. But if you give something for nothing, including sex, to a sinful man, he will take it even if you are not that attractive. In the end, she proved nothing to herself, and it only harmed her. In the end the sinner will taste the bitter results of sin. Sin is sweet in the mouth, making you drunk and delirious, but afterwards it will bite you like a serpent.

3. The excitement of sinning

There is a third aspect that is attractive about sin: the excitement. Sin is exciting because anything that involves a risk is exciting.

Over the years, you may have watched the same type of movies many times, and they all have the same old plot you have seen a dozen times. You can predict what the guy will do next: pull out his gun and kill someone. How boring.

But if I kill someone in real life, that is exciting! Many murders are committed in the United States every year. In 1976, around 18,000 murders took place, most of them in anger. But the explanations given for some of the murders are beyond understanding. The other day, a criminal was interviewed on television. He was asked why he had committed murder, and he said, "At first I wanted to commit suicide, but I didn't have the courage, so I killed the first guy who walked by." You are left scratching your head at this kind of thinking. It seems that he was bored with life and was looking for some excitement. And he found excitement in stabbing someone. For the murder, he was put behind bars for a few years, less than ten years, and was released. Maybe the next time he gets bored and is too scared to commit suicide, he will kill again, and spend another five or six years in jail.

Was he a lunatic? Not in the least. During the interview, he was perfectly rational and clear-minded. So why did he kill someone? It seems to stem from a desire for excitement. When life is boring and unfulfilling, you find a way to make it worth living.

So sin has its joys. First, you get something for nothing. Second, it takes skill. Third, it is exciting. These are three attractive reasons for committing sin, at least from the sinner's point of view. Which of the three is your reason for sinning? Or do you enjoy sin for all three reasons? Do you get

satisfaction from shouting at a subordinate at your office? Tearing him apart gives you satisfaction and releases the pressure off you. What is more, it takes skill to tear someone apart: You have to construct sharp coherent sentences, and needle the guy in a way to make it hurt.

The worst sin is pride

These are the reasons the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. There is yet another sin that is far more subtle and appeals especially to decent people who go to church on Sundays. We don't rob or steal, so we feel superior to thieves and robbers. We are proud of the fact that we are nice, decent and respected. It is not wrong to be nice or helpful, but if that leads to pride, you are guilty of the worst sin of all. Pride is a detestable sin in God's sight.

How do we religious people fall into this sin? Notice that I said "religious" people, not "spiritual" people. The spiritual man is not proud, but the religious man easily falls into pride. You may feel proud of the fact that you have not committed outward sins, or that you stole only one pencil from the company while everyone else stole ten. You cheated a few thousand dollars from your income tax, but that rich guy cheated millions, stashing the illicit money in tax havens. You are a decent person by comparison, even when

compared with the phony Christians who attend church and carry big Bibles. If that is your mindset, then you are under Satan's power more than anyone else, whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian.

It is terrifying how Satan can get you. If you pursue the good, he gets you. If you pursue the bad, he gets you. Satan checkmates you either way, and defeats you every time. There is only one way out, and that is through the power of God.

Like a mafia boss, the Antichrist will have it both ways. He will be a good guy when it suits him, and a bad guy when it suits him. A mafia boss can give thousands of dollars to the poor, yet kill a dozen rivals without blinking an eye. He has to do some good and some bad. He cannot live by doing all good or doing all bad.

How can you live under Satan's power, yet try to maintain a good conscience, without going insane? Just do a bit of bad and a bit of good. Steal from the office but give five dollars to a beggar. The clinking sounds of the coins in the tin can will make you feel good. Donate to a charitable organization like Oxfam to feel better about the money you cheated from taxes or stole from your company. We play a game of deception with our conscience, and think we are clever. This opens the way for Satan and the Antichrist to do their supreme work of deceit.

Judas and the Antichrist

2 Thessalonians 2:3 says that before Jesus comes again, there will be the apostasy. There will also be the appearance of the man of sin, also called “the son of perdition” or “the son of destruction”—that is, a person who will inherit destruction. Do you know where that term comes from? In John 17:12, the Lord Jesus refers to Judas as the son of destruction or the son of perdition, depending on the Bible version: “I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” (NASB)

The title “son of perdition” or “son of destruction” which is given to the Antichrist, the man of sin, is shared by only one other person: Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus himself for the ministry of the gospel. Let us bear this shocking fact in mind when we hear the popular teaching that the Antichrist is going to be a Gentile political dictator who will persecute the church.

Judas was an apostle of equal rank with his eleven fellow apostles, even Peter. Yet we read the dreadful words, “Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot” (Luke 22:3). Satan entered into a Christian? Much more than a Christian. Satan entered into an apostle of Jesus Christ.

How did Satan capture Judas? I have already outlined the attractiveness of sin by which Satan will catch us if we are not alert. The next time you find sin exciting, or as a skill

challenge, or a way to get something for nothing, or a source of pride, watch out, for Satan has a hook inside the sin.

You may say to yourself, "I'll just taste the bait, for I am too clever to swallow the whole thing with Satan's hook inside." But a fisherman knows that he doesn't have to wait for the fish to swallow the bait. As soon as he feels a light touch on his line, he pulls it hard without waiting for the fish to swallow the bait. He only has to hook the lip of the fish when it tastes the bait. And if you so much as taste Satan's bait, he is going to hook you.

That was how Judas was caught. John 12:6 says that Judas the super-Christian (since he was an apostle) was a thief. Now you can understand why I spent much time describing the motivations of a thief. Judas was caught by one or more of the three hooks I mentioned regarding the attractiveness of sin. If you think that Satan cannot catch you, or that you are smarter than Judas, then you have truly deceived yourself.

Judas was so trusted by his fellow disciples that he was made their treasurer. It shows that Judas was outwardly spiritual. He talked about the needs of the poor, as we see in John 12:3–6. Yet all along he had been stealing money (v.6) while also giving money to the poor. He had to do some good. And because he himself was poor, he probably felt no compunction in helping himself to the money. I am sure he

had a way to rationalize his actions, as does every sinner. Satan then catches you with his fishing line.

Will the Antichrist be the resurrected Judas?

Judas is the only person other than the Antichrist to be called the son of perdition, and that leads to our final question: Is Judas therefore the Antichrist? That is an interesting question. Some people think that the Antichrist will be Judas raised from Hades, the world of the dead. Dr. Richard W. DeHaan, a well-known Bible teacher in North America, holds this view. He thinks that Judas will be brought back again in the last days to serve as the Antichrist, and that the Christian world will recognize him as an apostle. Judas might even come back as a deeply repentant man, so that people think he is now a genuine apostle, for who can raise the dead but God?

All this is possible and interesting but doubtful. I don't think the Antichrist will be a resurrected Judas. The Antichrist may be similar to Judas but he is far worse. At least Judas seems to have some conscience. Although he did not repent after betraying the Lord, at least he felt enough remorse to commit suicide. But the Antichrist will have zero remorse over all the evil he will do.

Secondly, there is no obvious reason for God to bring Judas back from the dead, from Hades, to be the Antichrist.

Thirdly, Judas never had the aspiration to set himself up as God, unlike the Antichrist who has exactly this aspiration (2Thess.2:4).

Although the Antichrist will not be Judas brought back from the dead, I would say that DeHaan is correct to this extent: many will think that the Antichrist is a repentant Judas raised by God's power.

On the basis of Scripture expounded in this series of messages, it suffices to say that the Antichrist—like Judas if he had not betrayed the Lord—will be a great church leader and Bible teacher. He will manifest signs and wonders that the people will not know are being done by Satan's charismatic power.

Are you in Christ or in Satan?

You are either in Christ or in the evil one. If you are in the power of the evil one, then like Judas and the Antichrist, you are a son or a daughter of destruction, and are heading to disaster. I beg of you, turn away from sin as fast as you can. Promptly let God set you free from sin, for Satan may not give you the luxury of time that you hope you will get.

Chapter 10

Antichrist Against Christian Soldiers

This is our tenth message on the Antichrist. I don't know how much longer this series will carry on, for there is a lot of biblical material to cover on this topic if I were to work out all the details. I will remain as non-technical as possible on this vital subject of the Antichrist because if I were to make it technical for the benefit of those trained in theology, I fear that some others won't understand the messages. I will keep the messages simple because in our midst are non-Christians and young Christians, and I don't want you to be left in the dark about this important subject.

Two reasons the subject of the Antichrist is vital

First reason: The urgency of the times

I have many reasons for continuing on the subject of the Antichrist, but I will mention only two. The first reason is the urgency of the times, since the time is short. I notice to my anxiety, and much more to the Lord's anxiety, that many Christians are oblivious to the urgency of the times. They live as if they are going to live forever in this world, so they live carelessly and superficially, and spend their lives on unimportant things. They don't ever think of "redeeming the time" (Eph.5:16) because they don't see the urgency of the times in which we live. I see people who have been in church for years, yet haven't moved an inch spiritually. I think of what Proverbs says, that if a person is repeatedly warned and rebuked, yet doesn't take heed, he will be destroyed (Prov. 1:24–33; 29:1). If he doesn't take a warning to heart or sense its urgency, he will be taken away—he will pass away—suddenly without ever understanding it.

If you read the Scriptures carefully, everywhere you will feel a sense of urgency. The Lord's coming will be like a thief in the night, for you won't know the exact time of his coming.

His coming will take us by surprise, so we need to be watchful as exhorted in many verses.⁵ The urgency of the times calls for a soldier's watchfulness. He doesn't know when the enemy will strike—on which day, and whether in the morning or the evening—so he is alert at all times.

Many Christians fall because they are not alert. They don't even know what they on the alert for. They don't know that Satan realizes that his time is short, so he will try to inflict maximum damage in the short time left. I sometimes feel that we are in an army—if we can call it an army—that lacks the vaguest clue of what its mission is, how to fight the battle, and who the enemy is. There is no sense of urgency and no watchfulness.

Zeal for God is rare in the church today. Paul says that we must serve God with a godly zeal, and not “lag in diligence” (Romans 12:11), yet the church is full of wishy-washy Christians. As we see from Revelation chapter 3, the Lord Jesus cannot tolerate this kind of Christian. Why are so many Christians wishy-washy? Why do they waste their time on worthless activities, like quarrelling with one another? Why don't they get on with equipping themselves in the word of God so that they can fight the battle? The average Christian's understanding of the Bible is pathetic. Some have been in

⁵ Matthew 24:42–44; 25:13; Mark 13:33–37; Luke 12:35–40; 21:34–36; 1 Thess. 5:2–6; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 3:3; 16:15.

church for years, yet cannot find Hosea, Amos, or Haggai in the Bible. If you think you are good, try finding the book of Haggai in three seconds flat.

We are poorly equipped because we don't have a sense of urgency. So we are preoccupied with many other things. We don't understand Paul when he wishes that Christians would not be preoccupied with boy-girl relationships, something that occupies the minds of young people to no end, and gets them into much trouble. Paul simply says, *Why not remain single?* and we think that he is a fanatic and nutcase. We might not use such strong words, but in our minds, Paul is a fanatic. But he is no fanatic, for he knows that the time is short. To paraphrase what he says in 1 Cor.7:26: "We are living in a time of crisis, so don't waste time on this sort of thing, given the urgency of the times." So we say, "Waste time!?! Being with my girlfriend all day is the most valuable use of my time! Paul doesn't understand the delights of life. Maybe he had a girlfriend who left him, making him negative about boy-girl relations. Then this killjoy wants us to remain single like him, and get on with serving the Lord."

We don't share Paul's sense of urgency when he says, "Why are you wasting your time when people out there are perishing?" So you say, "Whatever will be will be. Those who will be saved will be saved, those who won't be saved won't be saved. Isn't this what you said in Romans chapter 9, if I understand it correctly?"

Do you have the sense of urgency? Many people don't see the urgency. They don't identify with Paul's burning zeal that compelled him to go to the ends of the earth where the gospel had not been preached (Romans 15:20). Where do we find this kind of Christian? I fear that we may not see the urgency, and that we won't be prepared when the Lord comes like a thief in the night.

Worse, the blood of those around us who perish will be required of us, and how will we answer for this? If love cannot motivate us, maybe fear can. Ezekiel 3:17–21 says that if we have the message of life and don't pass it on to the wicked, God will require from us the blood of those who perish. Let that sink into our minds. When Paul said goodbye to the Ephesian church, he was able to say, "I am free of the blood of any of you because I have preached to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:26–27) On that day, will the blood of your classmates, your colleagues, your family members, be charged to your account if they perish?

The urgency of the matter is the reason I keep the subject of the Antichrist before us. Jesus will not come until after the Antichrist appears (2Thess.2:1–3), so when the Antichrist is revealed, you will know that the Lord will be coming soon after. With the coming of the Antichrist so close at hand, are we going to wait for him to come before we burn with zeal? This is self-deception because when he comes, it will be too

late for you to be zealous, as I will explain soon. Now is the time to be active and zealous, and to know the urgency of the times, for when the Antichrist appears, it will too late for you to be zealous. If you miss today, you will not have another day. Those who do not stand today or burn for Christ today, will not stand on the day of the Antichrist, much less burn for the glory of God.

Second reason: The dangers facing a true Christian

The second reason I am keeping the subject of the Antichrist before you is to impress upon you the dangers of being a Christian. This is crucial because it is only when we understand the dangers of being a true Christian that we will begin to count the cost of being one. As I said, if you cannot burn for Christ today or stand for Christ today, you won't be able to do it when the Antichrist appears. If it is already hard enough to be a Christian today, let me tell you that it's going to be near impossible when the Antichrist comes.

Let me explain what I mean. In all his teachings, the Lord Jesus constantly warns us that being a Christian is a dangerous matter. In this church, we have never lied to anybody about this: we have never presented a rosy picture in order to get more people converted. I have never said that

becoming a Christian means peace, joy and blessings. Now, these things do come, but only to those who count the cost and pay the cost of becoming a Christian. If you became a Christian without counting and paying the cost of being a Christian, peace and joy will not be yours. Anyone who preaches peace and joy without mentioning the cost, is perpetrating a lie. But that's what many evangelists do today in evangelistic rallies, in the hope that people will come to the front and make a decision for Christ. The evangelists fear that the people will not come to the front if you tell them of the dangers of becoming a Christian, so they only talk of peace and joy and eternal life. The Lord Jesus says in many places ⁶ that he who saves his life will lose it, but the one who loses his life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel will save it. Why is this not mentioned in evangelistic meetings? The Lord never said, "Believe in me and everything will be nice and rosy, and you will have eternal life". No, what he says is, "If any man wants to follow me, let him take up his cross daily."

What does the cross mean but suffering and death? Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him take up the cross of suffering and death." I don't have the authority to sugarcoat this bitter pill for you. If you preach a false and

⁶ Mt. 10:38-39; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-25; 14:26-27; 17:33; John 12:25.

rosy gospel, people who become Christians for the spiritual opium that relieves their pain will collapse when the Antichrist appears. All those who treat Christianity as a spiritual aspirin to relieve the pains of life for one week—and return to church a week later for the next dose—will collapse when the Antichrist comes. What is the point of having 100 or 1000 people make a decision for Christ today if none of them will stand? In the coming days of the Antichrist, fearful things will happen to anyone who professes to be a believer.

I too can preach a sugar-coated gospel that will fill a church or an auditorium with people who love this kind of message, but to what end? Do we construct a house of straw and wood, only for it to be burned down by a fire? I would rather build a structure with steel and concrete. Its walls may be blackened by a fire, but the building will stand in fiery trials. What kind of church does the Lord Jesus want to build? A church built on solid rock.

Jesus tells us that becoming a Christian is enlisting in the army, not vacationing in Switzerland or Thailand. Nobody in his sound mind would enlist in the army if he is not ready to die. What kind of a soldier are you if you are not ready to suffer and die? The theme of being a soldier or spiritual commando runs through the Bible, and I will give you some examples of this in a moment.

Conversely, if you don't want to be a soldier of Christ, don't become a Christian. If you want to go on a vacation tour, or

become a spiritual drug addict who gets painkillers from the church, there are other churches that will offer you this. But not this church. We don't peddle spiritual drugs here. This is a place where the army of the Lord is being built up, to fight the battle to which we have been called, to suffer and to die. Rejecting the message of taking up the cross would be a grave mistake as you will find out when the Antichrist comes.

The church as an army

You would have observed that there are fundamentally two types of Christian. Both profess to be Christian, both have been baptized, yet there's a fundamental difference between them. One type of Christian—the one we are familiar with—consists of those who become Christians to save their own spiritual necks and for other selfish reasons. It is hard to differentiate such Christians from non-Christians for they remain self-centered even after conversion. They become Christians to gain comfort, or because they are lonely and want a church social life, or because they cannot handle the pressures of life and seek support. I hope you did not become a Christian for these selfish reasons.

Now it does happen that people come to God for selfish reasons, but the Lord gradually transforms them such that over time they lose their selfishness and become self-giving.

But the majority of those who become Christians for selfish reasons remain in their selfish ways. If your family is not impressed with your Christian life, or if your colleagues see no difference between you and some non-Christians, then you are Christian only in name.

But there is another type of Christian: soldiers of Christ who enlist not merely to save themselves, but to join the battle against sin, evil, and Satan. They enlist to fight for spiritual liberation, and are prepared to suffer and to die.

Yet when you meet such Christians, you will notice a surprising quality about them. Contrary to our expectation, they are not solemn and joyless people who grit their teeth all through life, but are filled with joy, peace, and a positive outlook in life. In biblical teaching, true joy and peace come only to this kind of Christian.

The Lord is building an army, not a church of self-centered people who are not any better than some non-Christians. I say *some* non-Christians because many of them are better than Christians, and it would be unfair to mischaracterize them. My point is that the Lord is not interested in so-called mass conversion but in enlisting spiritual commandos to fight under his leadership. He says, "Take up your cross and follow me." He will lead the battle against evil. He will be the first to die in battle, and we will follow closely behind. This kind of Christianity is equipped with God's power.

You may have read of the recent revolt in the Philippines. I was intrigued by the comments of a journalist stationed in the Philippines who said, "Mrs. Aquino came to power by a wave of popular support". His next remark was, "But the crowd that supported you can just as quickly turn against you." He was warning that Aquino was quickly losing the popular support she first had, for the crowds are unreliable. If you appeal to their interests, they will sweep you into power. But as soon as they feel you are not serving their interests, they can turn against you overnight.

Having the support of mass crowds is not always reliable. But a dedicated and well-trained army unit, even if it is small, is more reliable and potent. Soldiers are more consistent, and it is not easy to divert their commitment from a cause. Even today there are army units in the Philippines that remain loyal to Ferdinand Marcos despite his corrupt rule. That doesn't surprise us because army units are loyal and conservative. Governments derive their power not from popular support, but from dedicated and powerful army units, as every dictator in the world knows. The dictator might not have the popular support, but at least he has full control of his army. The army may be just a few percent of the population, yet it controls the country. Do you know how many soldiers were involved in this latest attempt to overthrow the president of the Philippines? It is almost laughable.

Eight hundred men! This small group tried to take over a country, and they nearly succeeded. As I said, the power of an army of committed soldiers, no matter how small, is far more potent than a large crowd of people numbering in the millions who are neither here nor there.

In the world today [1987] we have one billion Christians among the five billion people in the world. Among the Christians, there is a small minority of true Christians, but the majority are nominal Christians. Do they have any impact on the world today? You would think that one billion Christians would create an enormous impact on the world, but there is no impact.

Anyone who knows some history will know that the fortunes of many countries are determined by small, efficient, well-trained, and dedicated military units. The communists took control of China with its small, efficient, and dedicated army. A few thousand men took over a country which, at that time, had a population of over 500 million. If we know how world history works, we would not look for numbers. In the gospels, you will find that the Lord Jesus often stayed away from the crowds, and would spend his time with twelve men, then seventy. Later it was a group of 120 dedicated people who, at Pentecost, determined the history of Christianity.

The full armor of God and the sword of the Spirit

I earlier said that the theme of Christian soldier runs through the New Testament, so let me give you some of the evidence for this. It would take too much time to cover this in detail, so I will go over it quickly. We are familiar with Ephesians 6:11 onwards, in which Paul speaks of putting on the full armor of God, and taking up spiritual weapons. Would there be any need for armor and weapons if we are not in a war? Paul takes it for granted that the Ephesian Christians—indeed every Christian—would understand that when we become Christians, we are enlisted in the spiritual army.

Do you know what happened when the Communists came into Shanghai? As I shared in my testimony, I was interested in a military career before I became a Christian. I watched the battle in Shanghai from my apartment rooftop to get a good view of the surrounding areas. Bullets were flying and the night sky was lit up with artillery fire. Huge fires were burning in the suburbs as I watched the battle raging on. Then I saw something interesting. As the Communist soldiers advanced into Shanghai, do you know what the Nationalist soldiers did? They left their weapons on the streets, and soon the main streets of Shanghai were littered with submachine guns, hand grenades, rifles, and even uniforms. That's because the Communist soldiers will shoot anybody in a uniform, especially if he carries a weapon. As

the Nationalists were collapsing in face of the Communist attack, they fled to save themselves. They didn't want to suffer or die for a lost cause, so they got rid of their weapons, and removed their helmets and uniforms. They even knocked on doors because they couldn't very well walk around in their underwear. The point is that anyone carrying weapons and dressed in uniform would be recognized as an enemy.

Yet Paul says in Ephesians 6: "Put on your uniforms and take up your weapons! You don't want to be a defeated soldier who surrenders to the enemy!"

Are we like the Nationalist soldiers in Shanghai who got rid of their uniforms and weapons? Are you afraid of being recognized as a Christian? When you are at your office or in the world out there, are you wearing your uniform and holding your spiritual weapons so that people see a soldier of Christ? The New Testament does not know of soldiers dressed in civilian clothes, who wave white flags and don't take up weapons. As soon as you take off your uniform and dispose your weapons, you are no longer a soldier of Christ. Like the Nationalist soldiers, you have denied your cause.

We fight against a numerically superior force

The Lord Jesus portrays the Christian life in terms of warfare. In Luke 14:31–32, he speaks of a king who sits down and deliberates whether he is able with 10,000 soldiers to fight an enemy army of 20,000 soldiers. I have preached on this interesting passage before, and will not cover it again. The Christian must count the cost because in this war the odds are stacked against us. In the Christian life, the chances of suffering and dying are very high when an army of 10,000 soldiers battles an army of 20,000. You and I are committed to fighting a force numerically larger than ours. We will always fight as a minority against a numerically superior force. That is why our chances of suffering and dying are extremely high.

Paul often uses the metaphor of warfare. Romans 6:13 says that a Christian is to present the members of his body as “weapons” of righteousness. Here the Greek word *hoplon* means “weapons,” but it is watered down by some English Bibles as “instruments”. It’s curious that they should do this, for it indicates that they don’t like military terminology. But as Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* rightly observes, “The New Testament always has the word *hoplon* in the plural for weapons.” So when this word is used in the plural (as in Romans 6:13), it always means weapons, not instruments. Romans chapter 6 is about baptism, and Paul is

saying that when you are baptized and become a Christian, you are to present arms to the Lord Jesus just like a soldier going forth in battle presents arms to his commanding officer or general. We present the members of our body—our arms, our legs, our whole person—as weapons for righteousness.

Paul takes up this theme in Roman 13:12 where he again uses *hoplon*: “Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the weapons of light.” You put aside your former life of sin, and put on the weapons of light, for God is light. Paul uses *hoplon* again in 2 Corinthians 10:4, “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (NASB). Those who enlist in the army of God are powerful and well equipped. We have no reason to fear the battle because our weapons are powerful. But where are the powerful Christians today? It is my goal to make this church a church that, by God’s grace, obeys God’s call to enlist in the army of God, to be equipped with powerful weapons that bring down enemy strongholds.

Paul portrays the Christian as a soldier (1Cor.9:7). He exhorts Timothy to “fight the good fight,” literally, “war the good war” (1Tim.1:18). Paul says, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” (2Tim.2:3–4, ESV)

At the prayer meeting a sister shared that she had just returned from our church camp in Toronto where she lived in a bedroom shared with about ten sisters. They were crowded into one room, and the bunks were such that she would bang her head at one end and her feet would kick the other end. I couldn't help smiling. It is the same with our Montreal camp which was designed to toughen up the church people as a contrast to the easy life in Canada. It was arranged that everyone would live in tough conditions. If you thought Five Oaks Camp was uncomfortable, the Magog camp with its army style tents is far more so. If it rained hard enough, the water may start dripping inside the tent and onto your face. In Canada, the night is often cold even in summer, so you would freeze in the tents at night time. But at Five Oaks Camp in Ontario, at least you sleep in wooden cabins. The purpose of these camps is to toughen up our people with a few days of hard life. The first day was uncomfortable with the mosquitoes and other interesting creatures, but we so enjoyed the camp that we soon forgot about the hard life. In fact, my concern about the recent camps is that they are getting more and more comfortable, and are losing sight of the original purpose of military training. So we introduced early morning exercises, and encouraged jogging and swimming for physical toughening.

Paul says to Timothy, “Endure hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3). We in Hong Kong no longer know how to endure hardship, do we? The situation is even worse in Canada because life in Canada is easier. Non-Canadians would sometimes ask, “How do people survive in a cold place like Canada?” Cold? Every house in Canada is so well heated that you don’t feel the cold in winter. In Hong Kong you still feel the cold of winter because of inadequate heating, but not in Canada. In Hong Kong the summers are long, hot and humid, but in Canada it is hot for only three or four weeks in summer. The same heating system for winter can be often be switched to air conditioning for summer. We are like the American soldiers in the Korean war who became known as “chocolate soldiers” because they would not fight without getting their daily ration of chocolate. I was still in China during the Korean war and it became a standard joke in China that the Americans won’t fight without getting their rations of corned beef, chocolate, and other goodies. We don’t have to laugh at them, for we are probably worse than the American soldiers who went to Korea.

We must learn to die

There is one more point before I close. We must learn to endure hardship, but more than this, *we must learn to die*. If we are going to be soldiers, you and I must learn to die. What

kind of soldier is afraid to die? Yet I see a lot of Christians who fear death. Although death is not something to be dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders, we must train ourselves to be ready to die. No one can take up the cross who is unwilling to die, for the cross was originally an instrument of execution, not an ornament that we wear around our necks.

A recent case of a close friend of mine grieved my heart. He was a well known pastor in England whose name I will not mention. One day his doctor told him he was dying of cancer. What grieved my heart was that it set him on a frantic search for healing. I think Paul would have been embarrassed by such a reaction from a pastor. This pastor travelled from one end of the world to the other looking for someone in the church who had the gift of healing to heal him of cancer. Countless people prayed for him, yet he died, for God was not pleased to answer the prayers for his healing.

I have shared many times that I do not reject the gift of healing. I myself have played some part in healing. I prayed for a person with cancer, and the cancer completely disappeared after the prayer. So please understand that I don't despise healing. There is a proper place for it, but it has to be a proper place. It must never be used for the purpose of fleeing from death. We must be ready to say, "O Lord my God, I am ready to die with joy and dignity, if this is your good pleasure." Paul said to the Philippians: "I don't know which to

choose, to stay in this world for your sake or to die and be with Christ.” (cf. Phil.1:21–24) But Paul’s preference was to depart and be with Christ (v.23). You don’t see in Paul any trace of the fear of death. When he was told that he will suffer and die in Jerusalem, he set his face towards Jerusalem (Acts 21:10–14). What would you have done? Stay away from Jerusalem as far as possible?

Hebrews 2:14–15 says that Christ died for us in order that we may be delivered from the fear of death, which for many people is a lifelong slavery. You fear death because you want to preserve your self, your ego, your self-centeredness, your self-will. You cling to security, and cannot function as a soldier of Christ.

We cannot preach a gospel of freedom from sin without preaching freedom from the fear of death. It is not just the fear of physical death, but the fear of losing ourselves. There are two things we fear about death: that our body will die; and that we will lose ourselves—our identity, our pride, our self-centered existence. We fear the loss of these things even more than physical death.

A tragic example

Something happened in Hong Kong a few days ago that was on the front page of the South China Morning Post. There was a photo of a young man falling to his death, spread-eagled

with his arms stretched out like a skydiver, crashing from the seventh floor to the concrete ground below. Many of you saw the news on television or in the newspapers. A photographer captured the fall of this young man seconds before he crashed to his death, seven floors down. An attempt to resuscitate him failed. One of the explanations given for his suicide was that he had been confined in a detention center. Another is that he fared badly in his exams. It was a double blow: he could not face the world after failing his exams, and he was viewed as delinquent after spending time in a detention center. He feared something more than physical death: the loss of self, the loss of face, the loss of pride. It was like losing his soul. This is something we fear more than physical death. It is what Jesus describes as losing one's soul. The young man had nothing more to live for.

As a start, we can learn not to fear physical death. Then we can learn not to fear the loss of self and pride. We must learn not to care what people think of us, which is a form of self-centeredness. Why are we sensitive about what people say about us? Because the self is very much alive.

Revelation: A book of war

When the Antichrist comes, he will inflict great suffering on the saints who remain true to Christ, and grind them down.

Revelation is a book of war. I looked at the statistics for the book of Revelation, and it is interesting that no other book in the Bible speaks of war, suffering, and death as much as Revelation, which also happens to be the book that speaks of the Antichrist.

Let me quickly give you the statistics. In the book of Revelation, the Greek word for “war” occurs 9 times in the noun form and 6 times in the verb form, for a total of 15 occurrences. Yet the word occurs only once in the gospels. The word for “armies” occurs 4 times in Revelation. The word that means “victory in war,” usually translated as “overcoming,” occurs 16 times in Revelation; it also occurs 7 times in the first letter of John. These words are concentrated towards the end of the Bible, the end of the New Testament, because we are moving towards the end when the Antichrist will come. He will inflict such suffering and death on Christians that if you cannot stand firm now, you won’t have the slightest chance of standing in that dreadful future. Don’t think that you can become a faithful Christian only later on, at the last minute, when the Antichrist makes his appearance. If you are not faithful now, you won’t be faithful at the last minute.

To learn suffering, we must toughen ourselves as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 9. He toughened himself through physical discipline, in order to be ready for suffering. And did he ever suffer! He went through all types of physical abuse: he was

whipped, stoned, beaten, and got shipwrecked three times (2Cor.11:23–27). He toughened himself to be ready for intense suffering, just as soldiers go through intense training.

Think through the matter of death in order to be ready for the day your doctor tells you you are dying, so that you won't go into a state of shock. You look calmly at the doctor, lift up your eyes to God, and say, "Thanks be to God! I have prepared for this hour, and now my hour has come." The doctor may be the one to get a shock instead, for he has never seen a patient like this.

Don't be like the pastor I knew who travelled the world in a desperate search for healing. If it is God's will to heal me, let his will be done. If it is not his will, give thanks to God, for I'm going home. Today is the day to prepare your heart and mind. If you are admitted to hospital tomorrow and the doctor says to you, "I've got bad news for you. You have cancer." What will you do? Break down in tears? What if this news breaks tomorrow? How will I take it? Think through the matter, and don't evade it. Now is the time to prepare for it. If one day you are given the privilege to be shot for the name of Christ, will you cower before the rifles? "Lord, why did you put me here? I have been a good Christian who puts money in the offering box every week. But now I am about to die." I hope you will be able to stand there and look at the executioners in peace and joy, and say with Stephen and with

Jesus, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Then look up and see the glorious Lord as he stands to welcome you. Learn to die so that we may live triumphantly. He who does not know how to die in the Christian life will not know how to live the Christian life.

Chapter 11

The Antichrist, A Perversion of Paul

A light shining in God's creation

Yesterday as I was taking a walk by the riverside, as I often do to be quiet, to meditate, and to commune with the Lord, I saw an interesting insect. This small beetle was flying in the air. What struck me about the beetle was that it was shining with light. Have you ever seen a beetle with a light, its own torch? I watched it for some time, and was amazed that its light was so bright that it stood out in the darkness despite the many lights shining from the nearby bridge. How interesting it is that God has created an insect to be a light that shines in the dark! I then recalled being in Israel last year, at Eilat of the Red Sea, where we visited a place that exhibits all kinds of sea life. The fish in the aquariums are fascinating because they come in many shapes and colors. Then we walked into a room that was totally dark

and thought we had entered the wrong room. But we discovered that this room is always kept dark, because it has a species of small fish that carries its own light that shines in the dark. Very fascinating!

A true Christian: From darkness to light

I was reminded of the words in Scripture: “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.” (Eph.5:8) A Christian is someone who was once darkness, but is now light in the Lord. I wonder if that describes your life? Even if we may be insignificant people, are our lives a light that shines in the darkness? We might not be any more significant in the history of the world than that little beetle that flies in the air, or that little fish that swims in the darkness of the sea, yet we have the task of showing forth the glory of our Savior, by the light that shines from our lives. Light catches the eye’s attention. Many insects were flying around me, but none attracted my attention as this illuminated beetle flying in the air. Does your life and mine, insignificant though we are, cause people to be astonished by our lives? Do people ask, “How come there is a light shining in the darkness?”

I am thinking of Pastor Dieter who left last week after spending three weeks with us. I think the Third and the Fourth training teams benefitted a lot from fellowshipping

with him. I too was fellowshiping with him one day when I said to him, "You would remember, Dieter, the first time we met in Switzerland. At that time, all your thoughts and all your speech were that of a liberal theologian. A lot has happened in the twenty plus years ever since, so what has happened to you? I know about some of the changes in your life, but not all of it." He said, "Oh, it's a long story." Indeed, it is a long story of how God had changed his life. And I think the Third and Fourth teams can testify, after spending the most time with him, of his love for the Lord, his love for the word of God, and the beauty of Christ in his life. Once he was darkness, but now he is light in the Lord.

We went on a boat trip together and even on the boat Pastor Dieter brought along his Greek New Testament. He brings it with him wherever he goes, so that he may meditate on it. I think we can see how much he loves the word of God. Through the work of the Lord, God's grace shines forth in his life as seen in his devotion to God and God's word.

Although Pastor Dieter is an exceedingly brilliant person, he is not bookish, as a teammate noted. He has many abilities. Humanly speaking, he is an outstandingly capable person. He started to learn the piano at the age of fifteen or sixteen, and within some three years he passed the exam for the license to be a church organist. The other day in a gathering with the Third and the Fourth teams, we all had a

great time singing with him. We were singing songs in German and in Ashanti, an African language (he taught at a theological college in Ghana for a time). We were also singing songs in Hebrew, English and Chinese. Those of you who heard him play the piano could see with what ease he plays it. And the piano is not his only instrument, for he also plays the oboe and other instruments. He is a man of extraordinary gifts and abilities, as demonstrated not only by his doctorate of theology at Cambridge, but by many other things, even his typing skills. A long time ago in Switzerland, I once asked him to type me a short letter, and he typed so fast that as I walked the length of the room and back, he pulled the paper out of the machine and said, "Here is your letter." Truly we can see how God works in a person's heart and transforms a proud and self-confident man into one who manifests the beauty of Christ.

One of the great joys in serving God is the opportunity to see how he changes a person's life. It is a far greater reward than anything money can bring, and is the greatest testament to the fact that God is the living God. If it was not God who changed a life, we would have to ask, "Then who did it? How did this astonishing and fundamental transformation come about?" I am not talking about some moral reform by which you become a nicer person, or kick some bad habit such as smoking. I am talking about a fundamental transformation of character—a new person. I have seen people like

Pastor Dieter and others who have been utterly transformed by God's gracious work. All through the years I have watched this happen again and again, and it fills me with awe to see God's power.

The Antichrist: From light to darkness

My series of messages is about this dreadful character called the Antichrist. In my last message, I talked about the Christian's situation in the days of the Antichrist, who is the epitome of darkness. But something even more dreadful about the Antichrist is that he apparently was once some kind of light, but had become darkness—a darkness so dark as has never appeared in a man in the history of the world.

There are many inwardly dark people in this world. There are criminals such as the triads in Hong Kong who work with loan sharks, control massage parlors, extort, and rob. There has been darkness in human beings from the beginning of human history from the days of Cain, indeed from the time of Adam. But the darkness that will be found in the person of the Antichrist is particularly tragic—in whom light has become darkness. Among human beings, there are those who have been living in darkness all along, so their darkness does not surprise us. But when someone who is a shining light, or was so in the past, becomes darkness, the tragedy is a shock

in itself. When a good man becomes a Mafia boss, it is painful. But if he had always been a bad person who steadily got worse, it doesn't shock us too much.

One of the striking things about the book of Ezekiel is that the prophet Ezekiel speaks about this very thing several times. He says that if a righteous man turns his back on his righteousness and turns to evil, God's judgment will come upon him without mercy (Ezekiel 3:20; 18:24; 33:13). Ezekiel 28 talks about the Prince of Tyre, or the King of Tyre, who used to be full of glory and beauty and wisdom and perfection, but then became arrogant and evil, even blaspheming God. He regarded himself a divine person equal with God, setting himself above the very stars of God.

It is a tragedy of the first order when a good man turns bad. We are glad to say that this seldom happens, yet we are not unfamiliar with such tragic cases. It never ceases to astonish us when light is extinguished in a person, but even more so when he goes all the way to become utter darkness—a spiritual black hole that sucks goodness from everything into his evil being. Like I said, it is a tragedy of the first order. Do you know anybody like that? We seldom come across such cases, but it does happen.

The Antichrist will be a traitor

The Antichrist will be precisely this kind of person. He will be so evil that nothing will gratify him as much as persecuting the church and killing Christians. He doesn't just give Christians a bad time, he wants to exterminate them, though he was once a Christian. That makes him a traitor. We don't mind enemies as much we mind a traitor, and even the natural man hates a traitor.

There is a certain moral code among prison inmates. Even criminals have some sort of morality among themselves, and they utterly hate a certain kind of person: the informer, the traitor. They do not mind murderers much, especially cop killers. They do not mind rapists much unless they are child rapist; a child rapist can get killed in prison. But the one type they absolutely detest is the Judas type, the informer, the betrayer. Informers against the Mafia are often the first targets for assassination, for liquidation. Such informers will have to be placed under police protection.

The Antichrist will be this type of person—a traitor—as we will see from the Bible. He will lead the war against Christians though he himself was once a Christian, and he will stop at nothing less than putting Christians to death.

(Note: I will sometimes speak of the Antichrist as a non-Christian and sometimes as a Christian, depending on the

context. He is a non-Christian in his true inner self, but a Christian in his outward cloak of false Christian identity.)

As I said in the previous message, becoming a Christian in the last days will place you in the greatest dangers. It is not a matter of raising your hand and making a decision. All that is easy. What does it cost you to raise your hand and walk to the front to sign a form that declares you have made a decision for Christ? It costs nothing. I have been saying again and again that a preacher is not being truthful if he doesn't tell you that when you become a Christian, especially in these last days, it could cost you your life. We feel that preachers aren't supposed to say things like that, but should keep everything hush and quiet so that people won't be scared away from becoming Christians. Well, I am determined to scare you away from becoming a Christian if you are not prepared to love the truth at the cost of your own blood.

As a brother just said in his prayer, giving up all our possessions for the Lord doesn't come near to what the Lord has done for us. It is easier to give up your possessions than your blood. At least you still keep your life. Even if you turn your back on your career, you may still live a relatively good life—not as rich as before, but you still have all the things you need. And above all, you have wonderful coworkers and wonderful fellowship. But one of these days you and I may be called to stand for our faith with our blood. On that day, I don't want to see anyone who has come to the Lord in this

church to be running for his or her life. I'm going to scare you off if you are that easily scared. Don't even think about getting baptized if you are not prepared for what the Antichrist will do to you.

The Beast wages war on the saints and overcomes them

When the Antichrist comes there will be no enemy his equal. Why is he so dangerous? Because he comes from the church, and there is no enemy like the one who knows the church inside out. In his first letter, the apostle John warns us that the true enemies of the church will come from within the church; they will harm the church in ways more terrible than anything the church has ever seen.

As I said last time, if you go through the New Testament, everywhere you will see the theme of warfare, and that a Christian is engaged in spiritual warfare. This theme intensifies as the New Testament progresses, such that by the time you come to the book of Revelation, every page is talking about spiritual warfare. There is unceasing reference to armies, battles, conflicts, blood, death, and martyrs. The beast will wage war on the saints, as we see in Revelation 11:7; 12:17; 13:7. The beast is a term for the Antichrist in Revelation, 16 times in chapter 13 alone. The beast will make war on the

saints and, most dreadfully, “overcome them”. In most cases, this means physical death. But I fear that in some cases the word “overcome” would mean that he will defeat them spiritually, that is, cause them to apostatize.

Imagine yourself on the day the Antichrist is persecuting you. If he simply gives you a binary choice, “Deny Christ or die,” it wouldn’t be too bad. But what if he says to you, “Listen, my friend, I used to be a more zealous Christian than you. Which Bible school or seminary have you gone to? I studied at all these places.” By now time you are intimidated. “My friend, I know much more about Christianity than you. Have you ever performed a miracle?” “Ah, no.” “Well, I have performed miracles and I will perform a few more for you to see right now.” And you say, “Really?” “Yes, I will show you miracles that will really open your eyes.”

Straightforward persecution is not so bad because the choices before us are clear cut, but can you handle the pressure from somebody who knows much more about Christianity and spiritual things than you? That is terrifying. If your persecutor is just a brutal ignorant non-Christian, you can say, “Poor ignorant man. Father, forgive him because he doesn’t know what he is doing.” But you can’t pray like that for the Antichrist because he knows exactly what he is doing, as did Judas. The dreadful thing about Judas was that he was an apostle who betrayed the Lord. Can you imagine being persecuted by an apostle or ex-apostle of Christ who has

visions and miracles among his credentials, the likes of which you have not seen in anyone else?

Two titles of the Antichrist

Let us look at 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come [the day of Jesus Christ will not come] unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. (2 Thessalonians 2:3, NASB)

In this passage are two titles of the Antichrist that will be striking to anyone who is familiar with Scripture: the man of lawlessness and the son of destruction.

The son of perdition

We start with the second title, which is correctly translated “the son of perdition” in KJV, NKJV, RSV, NAB. Perdition means destruction, so some modern translations have “the son of destruction”—that is, the man who is destined for utter destruction because of his darkness that is unprecedented in history.

The title “son of perdition” occurs only twice in the New Testament: once of the Antichrist and once of Judas. This is the term that Jesus applies to Judas in John 17:12: “I guarded

them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.” (NASB)

This gives you a good clue as to who the Antichrist is. This fearful term gives clear indication that the Antichrist will be a man like Judas. That is striking indeed.

Judas was one of the twelve apostles who walked with Jesus. If you think that studying at a Bible seminary is some kind of achievement, think of someone who was actually trained by the Lord Jesus himself. In the church, there is no office higher than that of the apostle. The apostles are always regarded as being at the highest level in the church, below which are prophets and teachers.

There were other apostles beside the Twelve. Paul himself was an apostle (many of his letters begin with “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus”), but he was not one of the Twelve. Judas belonged not to this wider group of apostles, but was actually one of the twelve apostles personally chosen and trained by the Lord Jesus. Higher than that you cannot go in the church. Being one of the twelve apostles is the acme of church office. Judas belonged to the highest category and was trained by Jesus himself, yet he betrayed the Lord. That is why everyone feels sick in the stomach at the mention of the name *Judas*. As I said, even the natural man hates a traitor.

It is true that after he had betrayed the Lord, Judas had pangs of conscience and admitted to betraying innocent

blood. He thus testified that Jesus was innocent. So what was in the character of Judas that caused him to turn his back on Jesus? What was the problem with Judas? John's gospel tells us that Judas loved money (John 12:6). Here is an apostle who loved money, which means that he had never burned his bridge behind him when he followed Jesus. This gave him an open path to go back. After moving forward, he went back, all the way back into the world to the extent that he became a traitor. This characteristic of Judas is the first hint about the Antichrist and is a warning to all Christians: If you are a Christian, or are thinking about baptism, yet are not prepared to burn your bridge behind you, then one of these days you will go back over that bridge and nothing can stop the momentum. Not only will you go back over the bridge to become a non-Christian, you will become a traitor. That is what happened to Judas, and will happen to the Antichrist.

If you profess to be a Christian, did you burn your bridge when you were baptized? Did you die with Christ? Or have you allowed your bridge to remain so that when the going gets tough, or when money starts looking attractive again, you will turn around and go back?

I say this particularly to those in the full-time training teams. All our teammates are fairly qualified people, each holding one or more degrees. For such people the world will never stop being a source of temptation. Not only for them,

but for all of us, so that if we do not burn our bridges behind us, one of these days the world will make us an attractive offer (as has happened to me many times over the past years) that is hard to turn down. As leaders in the church, all of us have gained experience in leadership, planning, and administration. This kind of experience, when proven through years of service, is invaluable to the world. The world is always looking for people with proven experience in leadership, planning, and administration. One of these days an offer will come your way that is hard to turn down. “Would you like to be the general manager of our company?” I say particularly to my dear fellow coworkers that if you have not burned your bridges behind you, you will be tempted to look back after having put your hand to the plough. Once you do that, you won’t be able to step on the brakes, and you will go back faster and deeper. So don’t think that only Judas can be a Judas. All through the history of the church there have been a number of Judases whose traitorous deeds are appalling.

The man of sin

Let us consider the other title used of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: “the man of sin” or, in some versions, “the man of lawlessness”. The difference doesn’t matter too much, for sin and lawlessness are basically the same (“everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices

lawlessness; sin is lawlessness,” 1 John 3:4, ESV). On the basis of the textual and logical evidence, there is stronger support for the term “the man of sin” (but I won’t elaborate on this because it would be too technical for some of us). What can we learn from this title, the man of sin? Let us turn to 1 Timothy 1:15:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:15, ESV)

Here you have the one and only equivalent to the title “the man of sin” in the New Testament: Paul is the foremost sinner, or the chief of sinners, depending on the Bible version. Just as the title “the son of perdition” occurs only twice in the New Testament, so the title “the man of sin” or its equivalent occurs only twice in the New Testament. Paul is saying that he is the foremost and the chief of sinners. It means that Paul is the most outstanding example of sin, a person so utterly in the grip of sin that he can be called simply, “the man of sin”. Sin is so characteristic of him that he is the embodiment of sin. It is important to understand this link between Paul and the Antichrist. The Antichrist will be an apostle like Paul, but Paul in reverse—that is, the Antichrist will go in the opposite direction.

Three reasons Paul calls himself the chief of sinners

What makes Paul the chief of sinners? Let us look at verse 13 which provides the context to verse 15: “I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” (1 Timothy 1:13, NASB). Here Paul gives three reasons for calling himself the chief of sinners: he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a *hubristēs* (this is the Greek word that Paul uses here).

The reason for showing the Greek word is that this word is hard to translate into English. Every Bible version tries to translate this word but is unable to capture its full meaning with a single English word because its meaning is too wide. I will take a moment to explain to you what *hubristēs* means in Greek. It basically means arrogance, but that definition is insufficient. It means a person who is so arrogant and self-centered as to think of himself as a god of sorts. He thinks he can impose his will on others, trample on others, and do what he wants with others, with zero concern for their welfare. In his eyes there is nobody but himself.

One way to understand *hubristēs* is to watch the newsreels from the Second World War, some of which show a Nazi officer in his immaculate uniform with a hat emblazoned with the skull and crossbones. He arrogantly stands there with his hands on his hips, or with a whip in his hand, and shouts “Fire!” to shoot people with an ease that makes us

shudder. Then a whole line of people are mowed down. Those victims mean nothing to him; he might as well be stepping on insects. He gets rid of people like garbage. This is the kind of person conveyed by this Greek word *hubristēs*.⁷

Paul is saying, “I was like this Nazi officer who regards human life as garbage to be eliminated, and most tragically in God’s name.” Paul thought nothing of putting Christians to death in God’s name.

The Antichrist is like Paul in all three respects

As we have seen, the Antichrist will be a (false) Christian who puts other Christians to death. It is the saints he will destroy. Paul was doing this very thing, so he says of himself, “I am the chief of sinners, the man of sin, for I have put to death those who are of God.” It is interesting that every word he uses in 1 Timothy 1:13—blasphemer, persecutor, *hubristēs*—applies also to the Antichrist.

The term “blasphemer” is characteristic of the people living in the last days (see 2 Tim. 3:2, which has “blasphemer” in HCSB, KJV, NKJV, NET). The idea of blasphemer is applied several times to the Antichrist in Revelation 13:5–7a:

⁷ The English word *hubris* is related to this Greek word, but its modern meaning (“overbearing pride or self-confidence”) is much weaker, e.g. “he failed his exams because of his hubris”.

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and **blasphemous** words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to utter **blasphemies** against God, **blaspheming** his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. (Revelation 13:5–7a, ESV)

The Antichrist blasphemes God, blasphemes God’s name, and blasphemes God’s dwelling—the temple—a term that encompasses “those who dwell in heaven,” that is, heavenly beings.

The second word that Paul applies to himself is *persecutor*, which is exactly what the Antichrist will be. This passage in Revelation says that the Antichrist will be “allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them”. The Antichrist, like Paul, will persecute Christians and put them to death. In his former way of life, Paul was an arrogant man who trampled on the well-being of others with no concern for them. Do you begin to see the correspondence between the Antichrist and Paul? They are similar, but Paul reversed the direction of his life, and moved towards Jesus Christ. Paul says to the Galatians: “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.” (Galatians 1:13, ESV)

Paul didn't just persecute the church, he persecuted it "beyond measure"—beyond all limits. There was no limit to his ferocity in persecuting Christians, putting them to death, and destroying the church. That is exactly what the Antichrist will do. He will not only persecute the church, but will try to destroy it.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9–10, Paul says something of his violent past but also how God turned him around and transformed him:

For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1Cor. 15:9–10, ESV)

The vital difference between Paul and the Antichrist

Paul persecuted the Christians and put them to death with a zeal that is unprecedented in all previous attempts to destroy the church. That is exactly what the Antichrist will do.

But there is one important difference. Paul turned around and moved in the direction of Christ—and with the same

unsurpassed zeal he had as a persecutor of the church. He turned around from being a persecutor of the church to becoming the man whom some regard as the greatest apostle who is even more influential than the twelve apostles.

Here we see both the parallel and the contrast between Paul and the Antichrist. If you want to understand the Antichrist, you will have to understand him in the light of Paul. Paul was a persecutor of the church and a merciless blasphemer, but he did it in ignorance. But the Antichrist will know exactly what he is doing. Do you see the picture? Both are the chief of sinners. The difference between them lies in the directions of their lives. Paul went from being the chief of sinners, the persecutor of the church, to becoming an apostle who was faithful unto death, laying down his life for God and his church. But the Antichrist will go from chief apostle in his time to become a merciless persecutor and destroyer of the church. The other difference is that Paul didn't know what he was doing when he persecuted the church, but the Antichrist knows perfectly well what he is doing. That is why the beast will be shown no mercy at the judgment, for there is no more sacrifice for deliberate sins. He will be cast into the lake of fire with Satan (Rev.20:10).

Paul's life is one of the most astounding instance of God's transforming power in the history of the world. Even the most radical, the most liberal, the most critical New Testament scholars admit that they have no way of understanding

Paul. Because we are familiar with Paul's name, we tend to forget that he was once darkness of the most appalling type, yet he was transformed into a glorious light.

One of the greatest proofs that God is the living God is that he can take a sinner and make a saint out of him. There is no greater power than the power to make a new person out of someone who is rotten and depraved—the power to radically transform a person. I have seen and heard the testimony of a Mafia gangster who became a preacher of the gospel. There is no sin too difficult or too dark for God to forgive, and there is no sinner too evil for God to transform. As I said at the start of this message, one of the most amazing things about serving God is seeing lives being transformed. I hope you too will experience this transforming power. Then you will know that God is real. Why is God so real to me? Because I have seen what he has done with me, as I have testified on many occasions. I dread to think of what kind of person I could have become if God had not transformed me. Why was Paul, a ruthless persecutor of the church, suddenly transformed that he went on to become a person whom some regard as the greatest apostle? As I said, even those who are most antagonistic to the gospel don't have an answer for that. Paul himself explains that it is because he saw Jesus on the Damascus road. No one has been able to give a better explanation than that. That is the amazing power of God.

But the Antichrist will go in the opposite direction, from being an apostle to a persecutor of the church. Even worse, he will proclaim himself God, to take God's place. This we have seen in Revelation 13, but also in the following verse:

... who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2Th.2:4, ESV)

The Antichrist will be so arrogant as to want to displace God. Like the early Judas and the later Paul, he used to follow Jesus, but now he wants to be God. By contrast, Paul rejected all attempts by the people of Lystra to make a god out of him. This incident is recorded in Acts 14:8–18 but let's just read verses 11–15:

And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things?" (Acts 14:11–15a)

Paul had done an amazing miracle of healing, so the crowds wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods, and offer them sacrifices. But Paul and Barnabas tore their robes, and, after much effort, were able to stop the crowds from worshipping them. But the Antichrist will be ready to accept such worship, even demanding it.

Paul and the Antichrist: power, signs and wonders

The people of Lystra wanted to worship Paul because they saw the miracle he had done. Here we see yet another parallel between Paul and the Antichrist, this time in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, which says that the Antichrist will perform miracles by the power of Satan: “The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.” (ESV)

A remarkable fact then emerges from the New Testament. A few times in the New Testament the three words *power*, *signs*, *wonders*, are found together in the same verse but not necessarily in that order. But there is only one verse other than 2 Thessalonians 2:9 in which the same three words are arranged in that exact order—*power*, *signs*, *wonders*. That verse happens to be Romans 15:19 which refers to Paul

himself. A coincidence? Not in the Scriptures. Let us read Romans 15:18–19:

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, *by the power of signs and wonders*, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:18–19, ESV)

Here are the exact three words appearing in that exact same order in connection with Paul’s ministry. We see that the Antichrist is like Paul on every point, including: the title “the man of sin,” the blasphemies, the persecutions, the hubris, the power, signs, and wonders. What then is the vital difference between them? It is the direction of their lives.

Can you tell the Antichrist functions by Satan’s power?

If you are a Christian or a full-time worker, do not sit back and think you are safe and secure. The Antichrist will have a spiritual stature that will rival that of the apostle Paul. The Antichrist will be a great teacher in the church, but a false one. You would remember that in John’s first letter, the antichrists are false teachers but they are not *manifestly* so.

You will not know right away that they are false. That is the problem. In fact the twelve apostles apart from Judas could not tell who among them will betray the Lord. They didn't even know that anyone among them will betray him. The Antichrist will emerge from within the church as a false teacher and preacher of extraordinary power, a doer of miracles—and you won't be able to tell that he is false. He will eventually go on to persecute the church without measure, just as the apostle Paul had done. The most frightening type of persecutor is not an ordinary hostile non-Christian, but an apostle and foremost figure of the church. Your persecutor is not just a great teacher but someone who can perform miracles, signs and wonders before your eyes. Will you be able to tell by what power he performs them? The Bible says he will do it by Satan's power, but will you be able to discern that when you see him? No, it is hidden. The difference between Paul and the Antichrist is that Paul does miracles by the Spirit of God (Rom.15:19). But can you tell the difference even in Paul's case? I fear that on that day, there will be a great apostasy not merely because of persecution but because of who it is that is doing the persecuting. Will you be able to stand on that day, faithful unto death?

It is when we understand all this that we begin to understand Paul's enigmatic words in Galatians 1:8–9 (expanding on his words): "If I ever change my teaching in the future and

preach to you a gospel different from the one I have already preached to you, don't accept it. If I come back five years from now, and say to you, 'Remember the gospel I preached to you? Well, I am going to preach to you another gospel'—don't believe it either. Or if an angel from heaven preaches another gospel to you, don't believe it."

That's a strange statement to make, isn't it? Paul even hints of the possibility—though a remote one—that he himself might change for the worse. Is he saying all this because he is aware of another apostle like himself who is preaching another gospel? This seems unlikely from his statement in Galatians 1:8–9. Or is Paul thinking of the Antichrist who will preach a different gospel? Paul is aware that the Antichrist will be an apostle similar to himself in many respects such as doing signs and wonders, but he will preach a different gospel.

Beware of an apostle who will come and preach another gospel, and perform signs, wonders and miracles. This false apostle will preach what he claims is the true gospel, but it won't be the one that Paul preached. Stand fast, brothers and sisters, for that day is not far off.

The direction of your life

How can we be assured that we will stand fast on that day? There is only one way: the direction in which you are moving. You may oppose the gospel as Paul once did, but that isn't the most terrible thing if your heart is open to the truth and you are going in the right direction. Remember, it is the direction that matters. In Paul's case, the direction is going from being a persecutor to becoming the chief apostle; for the Antichrist it is moving from being the chief apostle of sorts to becoming the destroyer of the church.

You cannot be complacent about yourself even if you are a Christian or a full-time worker. Judas was an apostle, yet he went in the opposite direction from Paul: from apostle to traitor.

What is Paul's secret? It is found in Philippians 3:13–14: "Forgetting what lies behind ... I press on toward the goal with my all." The secret lies in the direction your life, and the intensity with which you are moving in that direction. Paul says, "I worked harder than any of them" (1Cor.15:10). He goes in the right direction—the upward direction—with an intensity that leaves all others behind. That is what makes Paul so outstanding.

Let us summarize. First, have you experienced God's power of transformation in your life? Can you say with Paul in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed" because of

what God has done in you? Second, are you going in the right direction in the upward call of God? Third, are you going in that direction with the intensity that Paul had, who was able to say, “I worked harder than all of them. I am the least of the apostles for persecuting the church of God, but I am moving forward with an intensity that none can match. It is not by my own power, but by the grace of God working in me.”

Chapter 12

Preparing to Face the Antichrist

This is our 12th message on the person of the Antichrist. If you are a non-Christian, you may be wondering why we are talking about the Antichrist. It is because we are looking forward with great expectation to the coming of the Lord Jesus. Just as Jesus came the first time—a historical fact—he will come a second time. But winter precedes spring. The Bible tells us that before spring arrives—the warm beautiful spring of Jesus' coming—there will be the long and dark winter of the Antichrist.

All this is prophesied in the Bible. The Scriptures are full of prophecies, and if you have studied them, you would know that they have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled in remarkable ways. You and I live in a time when biblical prophecies about the end times are being fulfilled at a breathtaking speed. For example, the world has witnessed Israel established as a nation. Israel had been dead for nearly two

thousand years, written off because its people, the Jews, were scattered all over the world. How can Israel be restored as a nation when its people are scattered? Yet all along the Bible has been prophesying that God will gather the Jews from every nation and bring them back to their home land. For two thousand years, skeptics ridiculed the whole idea, saying, “The prophecy has not been fulfilled in nearly two thousand years, so what happened to it? What ever happened to your claim that the Bible speaks the truth, and that God never makes any mistakes.”

Ever since 1948 when the Jewish state was established, the skeptics have been silent on this point, and the Bible has gained greater credibility. Moreover, it was not the Christians who made this prophecy come true, but the higher powers and authorities—God ultimately—that gathered the Jews back to the land of Israel. It is a land that some of us have visited several times and know first hand. Other major prophecies are waiting to be fulfilled, and the one immediately before us is the revealing of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist.

The coming of Antichrist is like the coming of winter

Why am I speaking about the Antichrist *to Christians*? It is because those who are not prepared for winter will not survive. I speak of winter as a citizen of Canada where the winter can be dreadful. I am not speaking of the winter in Hong Kong where it can be cold at times, but is still bearable. But the Canadian winter is not just an issue of comfort but a matter of survival. Many people in Canada put a thermometer outside the window of their homes to read the outdoor temperature, which can be -18 or -20 degrees Celsius in winter. Do you know how cold -20 C is? When the wind is blowing in your face, you also have to take into account something called the windchill factor. Those who live in warm countries might not know what it is. If it is -20C and you have a 40 kph wind blowing at you, you will be facing a windchill temperature of -34 C. The stronger the wind, the colder you will feel, even if you are wearing a heavy coat. It is life-threatening to those who are unprepared.

In Canada it happens from time to time that a car breaks down on a remote country road. At -20 C you dare not get out of the car to face a windchill temperature of -34 C, so you stay inside. But how long can you stay inside when the outside temperature keeps on dropping? There are rare reports of people freezing to death in Canada. That is why many of us in

Canada equip our cars with a CB radio (citizens band radio) so that you can call for help on the emergency channel, usually channel 9, in the hope that someone will rescue you.

So people in Canada equip themselves for winter. It is not just the CB radio, which is perhaps the most important item for your car. We also change our ordinary tires to snow tires to get a good grip on the winter roads. We pour antifreeze into our car radiator so that the radiator and the engine won't be cracked by freezing water.

Just as we prepare for the Canadian winter, we prepare for the winter before the coming of Jesus. Although our eyes are set on the spring of Jesus' coming, we still have a winter to face. The reason for this series on the Antichrist is my fear that many will not survive the winter for lack of preparation. When winter suddenly strikes, it will be absolute disaster.

About twelve years ago, we left England to take up the ministry of the Montreal church, and arrived in Canada in February, in the middle of winter. I had little idea of how cold it can be in Canada. Soon after my arrival, the church put at my disposal a car the likes of which I had not driven. It was a huge American car that felt more like a boat than a car.

In Liverpool, England, we would drive small cars, but here was this gigantic American car. In Liverpool, I would occasionally drive the church bus for the Sunday school, but I had not driven anything as big as this car in Canada. I had to get used to its size, but also to driving it on snow and ice. Those

who come from warmer climates may not know what it is like to drive a car on snow and ice. In England I experienced this only once, and it was terrible. The car was hard to control even over a thin layer of snow. But in Canada you have piles of snow, even walls of snow. Although I am experienced in driving motorcycles and cars, it was still quite scary to take the car out on the snow and ice on a February day in Montreal. To train myself, I would take the car out on a deserted road and see what it would do on snow and ice. I would speed down this deserted road and slam on the brakes to throw the car into a spin. I had to find out for myself what the car will do, since every car acts differently on snow and ice. I would deliberately throw the car into a spin to see how much it would spin. Every year at the first snowfall, I would repeat this exercise before I take the car out onto the highway.

In this world, we need to be ready for the unexpected in order to survive adverse circumstances. This world is a hostile environment especially in the spiritual realm, so we need to learn to function spiritually in a hostile world.

Which is more dangerous, a dictator or a deceiver?

In the past messages, I have been pointing out the shocking fact that the Antichrist will not be some kind of world dictator as some Bible teachers tell us. More astonishing than that, the Antichrist will be a church leader. He may also be a political figure at the same time, but more fundamentally the Antichrist will be a religious leader. It is this astonishing fact that will catch most Christians off their guard. In the martial arts, you cannot afford to be caught off your guard because it takes only one punch to defeat you.

Last time we saw that the Antichrist will not be just an ordinary church leader but an outstanding church leader of exceptional ability and training. That will make him a great danger to Christians.

Who is more dangerous, a dictator who persecutes the church to the point of bloodshed, or a Christian leader who deceives the church with false teaching? The former will create martyrs. The latter will be a Christian leader who, under the guise of truth, skillfully gives false teaching that most Christians would not be able to discern. Which is more dangerous? The first type poses a physical danger, with some of us put in jail or put to death. But that is not quite as dangerous as the false teacher who cheats you out of *your eternal life*

and inheritance. To lose one's physical life is frightening, but it is a small loss compared to losing one's eternal life.

So when Bible teachers tell us that the Antichrist will be a great dictator who will torture and kill us, it is not that frightening. This is not a new situation in the church, and it has happened many times in church history. The church has experienced both types of danger, but it is the second type—false teaching—that has been far more devastating for the church than the first type.

In the first three centuries of its existence, the early church went through several periods of intense persecution by the Roman emperors. One of the most terrible was the persecution under the emperor Decius. Many Christians were fed to lions, burned at the stake, or tortured to death. But more tragically, many Christians deserted the faith, apostatizing in the face of persecution and physical suffering. The church had gone through many periods of persecution, but in the end it survived. Though bloodied, the church is unbowed, and has been purified and strengthened by the terrible suffering.

Tertullian, a theologian and apologist in the early church, said, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." The greater the number of Christians killed, the greater the number of Christians who will emerge from the persecution. External persecution has never been fatal to the church.

Indeed it has the opposite effect: the church grows as a result of persecution. When the Communists established the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were an estimated three million Christians in China, a figure that includes both Catholics and Protestants. Today, after forty years of persecution, it is estimated that the Protestants alone number over thirty million. Thanks to the Communists, the church has multiplied 1000%. Persecution has never been able to destroy the church.

Those who are familiar with church history would know that the goal of persecution—the destruction of the church—could never be achieved by persecution despite its use of torture and execution, *yet that objective was more than once nearly achieved by false teachers*. On several occasions, false teachers very nearly destroyed the church. Anyone who has read a bit of church history would have heard of names such as Marcion whose false teaching split the church and nearly destroyed it. There were also the teachers of Gnosticism, an insidious teaching that infiltrated all the branches of the church. This was just the start, and soon many other false teachers arose who nearly destroyed the church. But we won't go into this topic today.

So what the emperors could not achieve with persecution, the false teachers within the church nearly achieved: the destruction of pure and genuine Christianity as taught in the New Testament.

Bible teachers who teach that the Antichrist will be some kind of a dictator like Hitler, have not paid sufficient attention to the Bible or church history. Dictators have never been a threat to the church. They may cause great suffering, but they have never succeeded in destroying the church. Yet false teachers can achieve what no dictator could ever achieve.

We do not deny the possibility that a church teacher may also have political power. Of the prominent U.S. presidential candidates right now, no fewer than two are pastors: Rev. Pat Robertson and Rev. Jesse Jackson. Both are prominent radio and television personalities and leaders of social-political movements, but they are first and foremost pastors.

Three things to observe

1. The greatest threats come from within the church

There are three things to observe regarding the dangers and threats to the church. First, the greatest threats do not come from outside the church but from within the church. The Antichrist, the man of sin, will be a prominent Christian teacher from within the church though he will also have political influence. Of the greatest concern to us is the fact that the Antichrist will be a capable church leader.

In the world today, we have many influential church leaders, but if they are not right with God, they will become a powerful tool in Satan's hands to destroy the church. This could happen if they fall into the grip of sin, covetousness, or greed.

It has been reported by countless newspapers as well as Time magazine and Newsweek that the Rev. Jim Bakker was receiving a salary of 1.1 million dollars in 1985. What kind of pastor gets a salary of 1.1 million U.S. dollars? It would be hard for people to believe that this was not motivated by the love of money. And his sordid sins have been widely reported as well. It gives me no pleasure to talk against fellow pastors, but it is our duty to denounce sin where there is sin, and evil where there is evil, and to call a spade a spade. This pastor has a vast television and radio network to reach an audience of millions, giving you an idea of the influence that a religious teacher such as the Antichrist will have. And when you combine that with political influence, the situation is terrifying.

2. Most Christians are easily deceived

The second frightening observation is that most Christians are gullible and ill-equipped to deal with falsehood. They cannot see through a lie, or discern false teaching as to whether it is biblically correct or not. It frightens me that it is easy to mislead Christians, even educated Christians, long-

time Christians, or theologically trained Christians. They are so gullible that the Antichrist will have a walkover. How will you defend yourself against the clever and erudite learning of the Antichrist? You will be like a sheep heading for slaughter. I can at any time hold a meeting in which I will defend in your presence a doctrine that you and I know to be false, and will challenge you to break my arguments. I have demonstrated this on a few occasions with the training teams, in which I defended, using Scripture, a false doctrine that they and I know to be false. Even though I was one man against the whole team, they could not break my defense. They recently did better on a particular doctrine, but that was because they used my own teaching against me. They had already studied this teaching carefully, and added further reflection of their own, so this time they were better equipped to handle this particular doctrine. But on other occasions, they could not break my defense even though I was defending the point entirely from Scripture, but in a misleading way. The problem was that they could not tell where I had misused the Scriptures.

This is why our church offers you one training program after another, to help you survive. It is for your eternal welfare that we are giving you all this training. Yet some people still don't know how to make use of the training. From recent conversations with the brothers and sisters, I have seen how

they misused the Scriptures, though I did not correct them on the spot. But when the Antichrist comes with his skill in the Scriptures, how will you uphold the truth? I fear that you will be defenseless against his deception. In the temptation of Jesus, Satan kept on quoting the Bible to Jesus. If you think you know your Bible, Satan knows it far better. He knows how to quote from the Bible in a way that you cannot rebut. Don't be confident about it just because you have gone to Bible school. Ironically, those who have gone to Bible school are some of the easiest to deceive. Do you know why? Because they follow certain fixed traditions that can be used against them to great effect.

I am saying this so that you will not place any confidence in yourself or in your training. Our confidence is based on one thing: a right relationship with God, in which the Holy Spirit—God's spirit—will lead us into the truth. When you walk in a living relationship with God, he will preserve you, and will bring Scripture to your attention.

3. Beware of religious legalism that is a cloak for a sinful life

The third thing I want to warn you about is this: If you are not walking in a living relationship with God, your life will go deeper and deeper into religious legalism. There are only two possibilities: either you truly know God, or you are like a non-

Christian who does not know God. Many professing Christians do not know God, and they are stumbling blocks who cause the non-Christians to say, “These Christians are no different from me.” And they are right. Such Christians are not any different because they are every bit under the bondage of sin as anyone else.

If you are a Christian, examine your life as to whether you are living under God’s lordship moment by moment. But if you are living instead under the lordship of sin, religion will become a cover for your sins. What does the lordship of sin mean? It means the same as it means for the non-Christian. You don’t know the spiritual purpose of your life. Your life is governed by the same motives as the non-Christian: self-centeredness, pride, greed, love of money—all of which can be hidden. There may be a subtle pride, a hidden greed, a disguised love of money.

The mystery of lawlessness

Paul speaks of “the mystery of lawlessness” (2Thess.2:7) in regard to the Antichrist. Why does Paul use the word “mystery”? Why doesn’t he just say “lawlessness”? And why is it a mystery? It is because his lawlessness will be hidden and concealed, at least in the beginning. The Antichrist, the man of sin, will not display his lawlessness for the world to see, but

will appear as the model of lawfulness that upholds the law. The mystery of lawlessness refers to a hidden lawlessness, which is why it is deadly.

As I said, there are only two possibilities: you are either living under the lordship of God, or you are living under the lordship of sin. The Antichrist, the man of sin, lives under the dominion of sin, which is lawlessness. The Bible equates the two when it says “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). I beg of you to examine your life and ask yourself, “Am I living in bondage to sin?” Your everyday life reveals your true condition. Examine your thoughts. Do you have lustful thoughts that compel you to look at pornographic material? Are you forever thinking of your stocks and bonds, especially after the recent stock market crash with billions of dollars lost overnight? Are you filled with anxiety, “What will happen to my stocks and investments? I can’t bear to think of all the money I am going to lose. I went to church today to ask God to save my shares. My salvation depends on the well-being of my investment portfolios. May God be merciful to me. If my shares go up, I will give him more money next week.”

What kind of Christianity are you living? We laugh at those who burn incense to the gods of prosperity, not realizing that we have our own god of prosperity even if it is slightly more dignified than the god who hovers over a biscuit tin box of incense ash.

Some Christians worship the god of prosperity preached by Jim Bakker via his television channels in Florida and North Carolina. We are in bondage to greed, and therefore to sin. We have a lot in common with the Antichrist, which makes it easy for him to deceive us. We function on the same wavelength as he, and understand his language. Rev. Jim Bakker likes to show U.S. banknotes on his television show, picking them up and dropping them to the ground. "Believe in God because he can make you rich. He can give you a Lincoln Continental, or, if you prefer, a Mercedes." What kind of gospel and what kind of God are we proclaiming? What kind of perverse thinking would exploit God for our own prosperity and good health?

The god we want is the god that the Antichrist will preach, and not the God of the Bible. If you want the god of prosperity, you can wait for the Antichrist to appear, or go to some existing antichrists who are already in the world. What kind of god do you believe in? What kind of life do you live? Do you lose your temper all the time? Or say bad things about people behind their backs? If you are in bondage to sin, you will be deceived by the Antichrist. In fact, right now you are already a follower of the Antichrist even before he appears.

Lawlessness finds expression in law

Let me come to the crux of the third point: This kind of religion, this kind of lawlessness, this bondage to sin, will always find expression in law and legalism. Lawlessness's affinity for law is surprising. Yet lawlessness needs law to legitimize itself. Would a Mafia boss go around declaring himself a lawless person? The Mafia or the triads cannot function or survive without a legal cover. They hire the best defense lawyers, so it is hard to convict them. They pay off the police so that they won't testify against them. They are a big problem for prosecution attorneys because they know how to use the law. For them the law is not just for evading justice, but a cloak of respectability. That's exactly what the Antichrist and every sinner will do.

If your faith is degenerating into legalism, you are in grave danger. If you go to church because it is the habitual thing to do, such that you don't feel good if you skip church, then you are doing it out of legalism. You go to church not because you love God or his people, but because it has become a habit of mind. You feel guilty if you don't go to church. That guilty feeling is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is not in itself a sufficient reason to go to church. All religion that is out of touch with God will soon become legalistic and ritualistic. It often develops into a religion of prohibitions: you cannot drink, cannot smoke, cannot go to cinemas. To be a proper

Christian, you mustn't do this, mustn't do that. I am often asked, "If I become a Christian, can I do this, can I do that?" They are afraid of becoming a slave to the law. And I would tell them, "My friend, a true Christian is free—that is, free from the bondage to sin and legalism, and free to walk in a living relationship with God." If God is not real, forget about Christianity. Who needs religion, laws, or ritualistic performances? I am a Christian because God is real to me, and I walk with him. But what is your reason for being a Christian? Are you living under the law, avoiding things such as smoking, drinking, and cosmetics? Do you have any *positive* reasons for being a Christian, or has your religion degenerated into legalism?

Legalism is so entrenched that it even affects the dogmas and teachings of the church. Strangely enough, we are taught we are saved by law—by the same people who say we have been delivered from legalism and the Old Testament law. You may be wondering how this is possible. It is because the evangelical Christian believes that salvation is based on a legal act of God called *justification*, in which we are acquitted by a legal act on God's part through the death of Christ. Although they reject salvation by law based on works, they accept salvation by an act of law called *justification*, with nothing else added to it. They believe that we are saved on the basis of a *de jure* act of God. As someone who has studied

theology for a long time, I find this mystifying in many ways. How strange it is that the same people who tell us we are not saved by the law, tell us that we are saved by a legal act of God, which is law.

The futility of a purely legal salvation

Example: The drug addict

We must reject any teaching that reduces salvation to one form of law or another. I will use an illustration that I have given before. In Malaysia, if you are caught with more than a few grams of certain drugs, you are given a mandatory death sentence that cannot be appealed. That applies even to foreigners. Recently, an Australian woman was sentenced to death for carrying a very small quantity of drugs, but above the amount liable to the death sentence.

Now suppose you are a drug addict and are arrested for possessing drugs. You are sentenced to death, but somebody says, "I will take the death sentence for you." If the judge accepts this, and if the other person takes your penalty while you go free, what good would that do? You are acquitted because somebody died in your place, yet you remain a drug addict. So you take drugs again only to be caught and

sentenced to death again. And who is going to die for you the next time?

This is the Christianity that is proclaimed today. We sinners are worthy of death before God, but Christ died in our place. To be clear, I do not reject this; I treasure this part of the gospel. But if that is the *entire* gospel, so help us God because we will be like the drug addict who after acquittal remains a drug addict. Addicted to sin, we will keep on sinning. And all along, we think we are saved by law.

What we need is a salvation that not only acquits us from sin, but also gives us grace to overcome sin and to be set free from the addiction to sin. What kind of god would play a cruel joke on us by freeing us from the guilt of sin but not from the power of sin? What kind of a game is he playing with us? Any one who thinks that God is like this must have missed Romans 8 and much of the rest of the New Testament. The glory of the gospel is not just that we have been acquitted legally, but that we have been freed from the power of sin.

Another example: The powerlessness of law

Here is another illustration. I have here a news report about a recent criminal case that is before the courts in New York City. It concerns a good-looking fashion model whom a man wanted to date. When she turned him down, he was so upset that he decided that if he cannot have this girl, no one else is

going to have her. He hired two thugs not just to beat her up, but to literally carve up her face. One thug held this girl down while the other carved her face with a knife. The doctors later did more than 150 stitches to stitch up the wounds on her face. This beautiful girl was utterly disfigured. These two thugs and the man who hired them were arrested, and hauled before a court in Manhattan. The three men were sentenced to jail for their treachery, and this former fashion model was awarded damages of 78 million U.S. dollars to compensate her for her suffering, her loss of income, her loss of beauty, as well as her medical fees.

But there is a further tragedy to this story: this poor girl will not get one cent. Legally (*de jure*) she was awarded \$78 million, but in actual fact (*de facto*) she will not get a cent. That's because the three men do not have money. Nor will they have the money to pay her when they are in jail, with the sentences ranging from five years to fifteen years. More than that, the award will remain in effect for only twenty years. That is a cruel work of the law, and it makes you wonder whether it is a joke.

A purely legal transaction may look beautiful in theory but it has no practical value whatsoever. Similarly, of what use is it if God grants us the promise of eternal life at the cost of the blood of his Son, yet we are unable to attain to that promise because we keep on falling back into bondage to sin for the

rest of our lives? It would be as if we had been awarded the whole world, and in the end got nothing.

Being a Christian has to do with a living relationship with God in which he empowers you by his grace to overcome sin and attain to the promise of eternal life. He does not just legally set you free from sin, and punish the culprit—Satan, in this case. What good will it do for you if Satan is thrown into hell? What good will it do for the girl who is scarred for life if the three culprits are jailed, when the real problem—sin—has not been addressed, and cannot be dealt with by an act of law?

A gospel that only offers you a legal salvation but cannot save you from sin in your daily life, is a farce, and I don't preach this kind of gospel. The gospel that the New Testament teaches and which I preach is not this kind of gospel in which you remain in bondage to sin, but a gospel in which God gives us the power through the Holy Spirit to live victoriously in the world.

It was because of Christians who lived defeated lives that I didn't want to be a Christian for many years. It was when I saw Christians who had been freed from the bondage to sin that I wanted to become a Christian. It is not that they were perfect or never did anything wrong, but they were able to overcome the power of sin. My life was turned around because I saw in these Christians God's power in action and

not just a legal act that accomplishes nothing in anyone. This kind of Christian life is not just a matter of acquittal, but one that enables me to live a life full of joy, meaning, and victory. I know God, and I fellowship with him because he makes himself real to me in my walk with him.

Ten points on detecting false teaching

In closing I would like to give you ten principles in point form that will serve as a guide to detecting false teaching, including that which will be taught by the Antichrist.

1. God, not the self, is the center of the life of the true Christian.
2. Jesus is Lord and not just Savior of our lives.
3. Christ delivered us not just from the guilt of sin, but from the power of sin.
4. Grace is God's enabling gift to us in the form of power to live victoriously. Grace is not just a free gift of forgiveness but God's enabling power. God is real to us because we experience this power in our lives, not just because of an act of the law that has no experiential reality in our lives.

5. Justification is not just a declaring righteous (*de jure*) but a making righteous (*de facto*) in order that we may live righteously.
6. Faith is total commitment in our hearts to God, and not just an intellectual assent to Christian doctrines.
7. Faith or commitment is continuous and ongoing, and not once and for all.
8. We are called to a new quality of life at the present time and not just to a future salvation.
9. The New Testament, indeed the whole Bible, affirms that holiness is obligatory rather than optional.
10. Finally, salvation in the Bible is communal, that is, within the body of Christ, rather than merely personal. Salvation is not a personal salvation. Salvation does not exist personally if it is outside the body of Christ, but must exist within the living body of Christ, the church. Our commitment to God must be confirmed by our commitment to the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. There is no commitment to God that does not involve commitment to my brothers and sisters in this church and any other church where Christ is Lord.

If we fully understand these ten points, we will not be deceived by the Antichrist.

Chapter 13

Antichrist Means Pseudo Christ

In the Old Testament, one of the great criticisms leveled against the leaders of Israel was that they had failed to warn the people of their sin and of God's impending judgment. Terrible disasters were coming, yet the leaders failed to warn the people about them. God's judgment then came upon the people like a thief in the night, catching them unprepared. Their nation was wiped out, as has happened more than once in the history of Israel.

I do not wish to be guilty of this kind of neglect, which is why in this series of messages I have been speaking about a danger that is coming upon the church in the person of the Antichrist. On the day when you and I stand before the Lord—when we will all stand before the king of kings and lord of lords—it will not be laid to my charge that I did not warn you of the dreadful danger that is to come.

Preparing for the long cold winter

Last time I spoke of the long cold winter of the Antichrist. I also told you how in Canada we prepare for winter, because if you are not prepared for the Canadian winter, it could cost you your life. Every driver in Canada knows of the danger of driving on the intercity highways. If your car breaks down in extreme winter, you may have as little as 20 minutes to live, or perhaps a couple of hours under certain situations. When the engine stops working and the heating goes off, you may not live long if no one comes to your rescue. That's why in Canada we are well prepared (or ought to be) for the winter. There are a number of things we can do in preparation. One is to install a citizens band (CB) radio in your car for making emergency calls for help. The police would usually tune into the emergency channel. The radio is not a luxury but a necessity in Canada. Yet many Canadian drivers don't have a CB radio in their cars when they are driving intercity. If your car breaks down in the middle of the night when there are few cars on the road, you would have no way of calling for help. In daytime your situation is better because you can flag down another car, but what if you are in a remote area where few cars pass by? Canada is a vast country with a relatively small population, and if you are unable to flag down a car for help, you may not live for long.

Three ways to prepare

1. Prayer, our spiritual radio

We have a long winter ahead of us: the long winter of the Antichrist. At least it will feel long to those who have to endure it. Twenty minutes by the watch is a short time, but enduring twenty minutes of suffering will feel like a long time. In the long winter of the Antichrist, we must get our spiritual CB radios going if we are to survive. The crucial question is: Do you have a radio at all, and is it working? That radio is prayer, communion with God. When the Antichrist comes and you don't know how to pray or don't pray, you are finished. When the Antichrist turns his attention on you and you don't know how to pray, you will be gone in the spiritual equivalent of twenty minutes. If you wait until the arrival of the Antichrist before you start learning to pray, it will be a bit late. Learning to pray is a preparation you must make now. It is urgent to get your radio working before winter starts. Are you going to wait until your car breaks down in the middle of the winter before you turn on your CB radio only to discover it's not working? You can shout into the radio all you want, but nobody will hear you. Inside the car, you will be getting colder and colder with the outside temperature at -20 C, which is not unusual in January. You will die if your radio is

not working. So we must learn to pray, and draw help and strength from the Lord at all times.

2. Keep a grip on the road: The word of God

A second thing that every wise Canadian driver does is to change his car tires *from ordinary tires to snow tires* as soon as the weather starts getting cold. If you drive in Canadian winter with ordinary tires, sooner or later your car will skid, go into a spin, or maybe fall into a ditch. But snow tires grip the snow and the ice. They are like a weapon; they lock into the snow, and give the car a firm grip.

We too need to have a firm grip on the road of the Christian life—the Way, as it is called in the New Testament. You may be on the right road and going in the right direction, but without a firm grip on the road your wheels will spin out of control. It is important to hold fast in the most adverse conditions. We need to have a grip on the road, the Way, to hold fast. The Way is the word of God, the Bible. Do you know your Bible? If you start learning the Bible only when the Antichrist appears, it will be a bit too late. You don't just start installing snow tires when you are stuck in the middle of nowhere.

3. Be properly clothed: Put on Christ

There is a third thing we need to do in winter: *put on warm clothes*. Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans

13:14). Christ is portrayed as the clothing we put on. Clothing protects us, beautifies us, and does many other things. I could preach a whole message on clothing to illustrate what it means to put on Christ.

Besides protecting us from the cold and beautifying us, what else does clothing do? When you see people in police uniforms, you know that they are police officers. It is by their uniforms that we recognize police officers and their law enforcement authority. Putting on Christ means all of these things: he protects us, keeps us warm in the winter of the Antichrist, beautifies us, and glorifies us. And he gives his people spiritual authority against the power of the enemy.

So we prepare for the spiritual winter of the Antichrist in three important ways. First, we get our spiritual radios going—we learn to pray. Second, we get a firm grip on the road, the Way, by learning and living out the word of God. Third, we put on the Lord Jesus Christ to be clothed in him.

It is easy to recognize winter, but hard to recognize the Antichrist

In all my messages, I have been warning again and again that the Antichrist will be very hard to recognize. It is easy to recognize literal winter, but hard to recognize the Antichrist. It is easy to prepare for an enemy we see, but hard to prepare

for an enemy we don't see. In preparing for winter, we can observe the weather patterns; we are trained in this because winter comes every year. But not so with the Antichrist because he does not come every year. In fact, Christians can't even tell if he has already arrived. We have enough trouble recognizing even minor antichrists who are already in the world. The coming of the great Antichrist will certainly take us by surprise.

I have also warned that the topic of the Antichrist is being taught in two different ways today. There is the popular notion that the Antichrist will come from *outside the church* as some kind of world dictator who will persecute the church. I have mentioned again and again that this notion is unscriptural. I have been saying that the Antichrist will come from *within the church*, and I am not alone in saying this. This fact is shocking, and many have difficulty grasping it. A pastor's wife who recently visited our church was astonished at my message which said the Antichrist will come from within the church, which indicates that she had not heard this teaching before. Many pastors today are not aware that the Antichrist will come from within the church.

Books that speak of the church's spiritual condition

1. *Damned Through the Church*

I have noticed that more and more books are being written on the dire spiritual state of the church today. I will give two examples. I have already mentioned a book with a shocking title, *Damned Through the Church*. Its author said that he originally had a much stronger title in mind, but the publisher begged him to tone it down. But even the revised title, *Damned Through the Church*, is shocking enough.

Similar books are appearing these days, and I thank God that he is raising up servants who see the dangers in the church, and the need to issue a warning. If you think that such books are written by spiritual quacks and theological ignoramuses on the fringes of the church, you are mistaken. *Damned Through the Church* was written by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, a minister of the Lutheran church who holds seven degrees, of which two are doctorates: a PhD and a ThD (Doctor of Theology).

2. *The Subversion of Christianity*

I recently came across another book with a striking title: *The Subversion of Christianity*, written by Jacques Ellul, a

Frenchman. It is a translation of his French book, *La Subversion du Christianisme*. Ellul is a professor at the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences at the University of Bordeaux. He writes prolifically on many subjects, including Christianity and theology, and this is his fortieth book.⁸ That is quite a lot of books for one man to write. He is well known in theological circles. A measure of the importance of this book is the fact that it was translated from French to English by Geoffrey Bromiley, a theologian and the sole translator, from German to English, of Kittel's ten-volume *Theological Dictionary of the NT*. It shows the importance that theologians attach to this book by Professor Ellul.

I would like to read to you Ellul's opening lines. At the start of his book, just before the first chapter, Ellul quotes Søren Kierkegaard, a great Danish thinker. This is what Kierkegaard says:

The Christianity of Christendom transforms Christianity into something entirely different from what it is in the New Testament, yea, into exactly the opposite; and this is the Christianity of Christendom, of us men.

Hard-hitting words! Kierkegaard is saying that Christianity today is totally different from what it was in the New

⁸ By the time Jacques Ellul died in 1994, he had authored more than 60 books and 600 articles.

Testament—in fact its very opposite. His words are stronger than anything I have ever said about the church.

As I said, we must keep a grip on the word of God, just as snow tires maintain a grip on the road. Kierkegaard is telling us that the church has long lost its grip on the road; it has spun around, and is headed in the opposite direction. It reminds me of what happened when Uncle Don drove me home from church one Sunday evening in winter. The car turned a corner towards an incline when it suddenly spun around, and we were in the opposite direction. Uncle Don is experienced in winter driving, yet even the snow tires lost their grip, and the car spun 180 degrees.

The world situation today is just as dangerous for the Christian. Kierkegaard warns that the church has gone off the track, and has spun 180 degrees to a direction opposite to that of the Christianity of the New Testament. So when we are talking about the Antichrist, we are indeed talking about *the subversion of the church*. More than a century ago, Kierkegaard had already warned us that the church had been subverted. That is why Ellul quotes him even before the opening chapter of his book.

Let me read to you the first few lines of Ellul's first chapter, for they sum up the purpose of his book:

The question that I want to sketch in this work is one that troubles me most deeply. As I now see it, it seems to be insoluble and assumes a serious character of historical oddness. It may be put very simply: How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of the Law, the Prophets, Jesus, and Paul? I say advisedly ‘completely opposite’.

Ellul is saying that something unusual has happened. How has it come about that the Christian civilization—in France, Germany, England, and other places—bears not the slightest resemblance to the church of the New Testament? For the most part, its churches have become state churches, in which the heads of the church are secular heads of state, as in the case of Church of England. The churches in the Christian civilization that we see in Europe and America contradict the Bible “not on one point but on all points”. Those are Ellul’s own words. I have never said anything quite as strong about the church. We must bear in mind that this book was written not by a nutcase operating at the fringes, but by a Christian thinker with intellectual and prophetic insight. We live in dangerous times. The Antichrist’s work has been cut out for him because the subversion of the church has already started.

Why do some teach that the Antichrist is solely a *contra* Christ?

As we approach the end of this series, I want to repeat something I hope for the last time. We must distinguish between two possible meanings of the prefix *anti* in the word *Antichrist*. It is important for us to bear this distinction in mind because it gives rise to two possible meanings for the word Antichrist.

As I said, *anti* can mean “against”. For example, an anti-aircraft gun is used *against* aircraft. Here the meaning of *anti* is “against” or “contra,” so I used the term “contra Christ” for this *contra* idea of the Antichrist.

But the other meaning of *anti*—the predominant meaning in the New Testament—expresses the idea that a thing replaces another thing as a substitute or replacement (see the Appendix of this book). When the New Testament says that the Son of Man gave his life a ransom “for many” (Mark 10:45), the Greek words here are *anti pollōn*—for us, in our place, as our substitute. So *anti* means something quite different from the common meaning “against” for the word *anti* in English. Speakers of English are generally unfamiliar with this sense of *anti*.

To express this sense, we use the term “pseudo,” which in the case of the Antichrist would make him a *pseudo* Christ—

one who pretends to be Christ and tries to stand in the place of Christ.

Despite this important distinction between the two meanings of *anti*, many books on the Antichrist do not distinguish them, leading to utter confusion. We have two possible meanings of *Antichrist*—contra Christ versus pseudo Christ—yet most writers today talk about Antichrist as if he is solely a *contra* Christ.

Why do these books portray the Antichrist *solely* as a contra Christ? These books have one thing in common: they base their case on the book of Daniel in the Old Testament.

Daniel must be understood in its historical perspective

I won't go into the book of Daniel because the details are too complex to explain in one message. All I will do is give a few brief points for those who want to do a further study of Daniel.

Where do these writers get the notion that the Antichrist is to be understood *solely* as a contra Christ? They rightly observe that in Matthew 24:15, the Lord speaks of “the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel”. Although Jesus refers to Daniel the prophet, he *speaks specifically only* of the abomination of desolation. It is an

error to assume that because Jesus mentions one specific thing about Daniel, he is referring to the whole book of Daniel. That is a common exegetical error. If I quote a specific verse in the Old Testament, it doesn't necessarily mean that I am referring to the whole book in which the verse appears. Why then do these writers assume that because Jesus makes a specific reference to the abomination of desolation in Daniel, that he is referring to the whole book of Daniel and to every prophecy in Daniel?

The confusion arises because they depend almost exclusively on Daniel chapters 7 and 8 for their biblical support. Chapter 7 speaks of four beasts that symbolize four kingdoms. What do these four beasts and four kingdoms correspond to? This has led to all kinds of interesting theories which we won't go into.

To understand the book of Daniel, we need to look at it from its historical perspective. Daniel prophesied the coming of a great enemy of God and of God's people who will desecrate the temple. This was fulfilled in the historical person of king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the main figure in the desecration the temple in the period 167–164 BC. I have briefly discussed this elsewhere, so I won't go into the details again. Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled when Antiochus desecrated the temple by offering a pig, which to the Jews is an unclean animal, at the altar. So he polluted and desecrated

the temple and the altar, which was an abomination. Hence the Scriptures speak of “the abomination of desolation” or the abomination that makes desolate. The prophecy in the book of Daniel has been fulfilled.

The exegetical problem begins when the writers assume that the Antichrist will be a contra Christ, so they take Antiochus, this Greek king who tried to force the Jews into accepting the Greek religion, as the model of the Antichrist. In their view, the Antichrist will be a super Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek king prophesied by Daniel.

Three reasons Antiochus is not a model of the Antichrist

1. You cannot be “anti” someone you don’t know exists

First, it doesn’t make much sense to say that Antiochus is a model of the coming Antichrist because Christ had not yet come in his time. How can Antiochus be a model of the Antichrist since he cannot be *anti* somebody—Christ—whom he didn’t know existed? Antiochus was an enemy of the Jews, but that does not make him an enemy of Christ himself.

2. The contra Christ idea dilutes “Antichrist” to “anti-Christian”

Second, these writers view the Antichrist as a political figure—in some cases a military figure like Antiochus—and as a contra Christ, so they view the Antichrist basically as a persecutor and oppressor. If that is all there is to the Antichrist, there would be nothing unusual about it, for the church has always been persecuted from its early days. Since there is nothing new about persecution, is there anything unique about the Antichrist’s work of persecution? If you say that his persecution of Christians is unique for its worldwide scale, wouldn’t that make him anti-Christian rather than anti-Christ? Despite the connection between Christ and Christians, they are not identical, nor one and the same. If we understand the Antichrist solely as a contra Christ, how can he persecute the risen Christ who is not on earth but is at the right hand of the Father far away from the reach of the Antichrist? The Antichrist cannot harm Christ directly, but only harm Christians. Therefore we would have to dilute the term Antichrist to Anti-Christian, that is, dilute contra Christ to contra Christian.

3. To attack Christians on a spiritual level, the Antichrist would have to be a spiritual and not just a political figure

Third, does it make any sense to equate a political leader or a military figure with the Antichrist? After all, Christ is not a political or military figure but a spiritual figure. Jesus says, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). If the Antichrist is a political or military figure, he might attack Christians politically or militarily, causing great physical harm, but he cannot attack us spiritually if he is only a political figure. Only a spiritual Antichrist can attack us on a true spiritual level, and not merely political. He can still persecute us for our faith, but he cannot attack us at the deepest spiritual level.

What about Adolf Hitler as a model of Antichrist? One writer says Hitler is the model for the Antichrist and rejects the idea of Antiochus as the model for the Antichrist. It is true that Hitler is a model of the Antichrist in some limited sense, but in certain important ways he is not a model of the Antichrist.

First, Hitler was a Christian, brought up as a Roman Catholic. Hitler hated the Jews, but he never said anything against Christ. As for Antiochus, it is not certain that he was against the Jews *per se*, but only against their religion which caused the Jews to reject his Greek or Hellenizing policy.

Second, Hitler never attacked Christian doctrines or the church as a church *per se*. But he persecuted, directly or indirectly, certain leaders of the church such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer who were actively opposed to his political policies. And Hitler's attack was on the political rather than the spiritual level.

The Antichrist will be a pseudo Christ

All these theories about the Antichrist as a political figure who persecutes the church are off the track. On the contrary, the truly great danger to the church is the *pseudo* Christ who comes from within the church—a church that has been subverted and corrupted as Montgomery, Kierkegaard and Ellul have warned us. The danger is that we are being deceived without our knowing it.

Suppose somebody points a gun at my head and says, "Are you going to believe in Jesus? If yes, I will shoot you. If no, I will let you go". That is certainly a threat to my faith, but not nearly as dangerous as deception, for I can still see the danger in front of me and make a decision. I can say, "I won't deny Jesus, so go ahead and pull the trigger." It is certainly a danger but not as dangerous as a false teacher who misleads you such that you think you are on the right path when you

are on the wrong path. You have lost the way to eternal life without your knowing it. Isn't that much more terrifying?

In any case, the contra Christ idea does not provide us very much that we can prepare for. That is because the world has always been contra Christ. Jesus says, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). The world has always been contra Christ, but this does not bring out the biblical meaning of Antichrist.

The contra Christ idea does not include the pseudo Christ idea, *but the pseudo Christ idea includes the contra Christ idea*. Because the pseudo Christ wants to take the place of the real Christ, that in itself is a hostile act that is contra Christ. So while we hold the pseudo Christ idea, we do not reject the contra Christ idea. But the reverse is not true. The contra Christ idea that is popular today does not recognize the pseudo Christ idea.

A real gun or a pseudo-gun?

Let me give an illustration. I hope it won't shock you too much. As you can see, I came up to this podium wearing a jacket. It just so happens that today is a cold day, so you may think that the Lord had prearranged the cold weather for me to give you this particular illustration.

Here is something inside my jacket. I am now holding a 36 caliber Beretta, a powerful handgun. When I was a youth

living in China, the situation in China before Communist rule was turbulent, so my father and I both had a gun similar to this one. My father's gun had a nicer handle, but mine had a handle like this one. What we had was not a Beretta but a 38 caliber Browning. People with police or military training would know what a Browning 38 looks like. It looks similar to the Beretta.

This Beretta is popular because of its compact size. That's why you didn't even notice that I was carrying a gun in my jacket when I walked to the platform. It is small enough to fit into my vest pocket without much of a bulge. I can put it under my armpit using a special shoulder holster, and then cover the whole thing with my jacket. That was the way my father used to carry his gun. This gun is small enough to conceal but powerful enough to kill. It is a deadly automatic weapon.

If I call this gun a contra-gun, I wouldn't be saying anything special, for all guns are contra-guns in the sense of opposing other guns. Shootouts are common in the United States where there more guns than people.⁹ As for this gun I am holding, there are two possibilities: it is either a real gun (a contra-gun) or a fake gun (a pseudo-gun). Which one is it?

⁹ In 2017, there were 120.5 civilian firearms per 100 persons in the United States. See Wikipedia article, "Estimated number of civilian guns per capita by country".

Many bank robberies are carried out with a gun. If I point this gun at a bank teller, it would be foolish for the person to assume it is a fake gun. In fact, law enforcement officers say there is no quick way to tell whether a gun is real or not, and in some cases, it is hard to tell even if you look closely. I don't think you can tell whether this gun is fake or real. In fact, many bank robberies are carried out with this type of gun. As you may have heard, the police are pressing for legislation to prohibit the sale of fake models of this type of gun, because it is hard to tell whether it is real or fake apart from a careful inspection. Nowadays you can buy a high-quality model gun that a gun expert cannot tell whether it is fake or real until you fire it. It is made like the real gun down to the fine details, the main difference being that it lacks a real firing chamber.

Even if I pulled the trigger of this gun, can you tell it is a real gun? I now pull the trigger (click). Nothing happened, so would you say it's a fake gun? Not so fast. You cannot assume it is fake, for there is no bullet or live ammunition inside. A real gun will make a clicking sound even if it has no bullets. The fact that I was able to cock the gun shows that it could still be a real gun. Your only safe conclusion would be that I have not put any live ammunition into it.

To analyze this in a different way, I could say this is not a real gun because it is incapable of firing real bullets. Or I could say it is not a genuine Beretta, yet it is nonetheless a real gun manufactured by a different gun company. It is like

visiting a computer store and buying a Pineapple computer that looks like an Apple computer, but doesn't run Apple software. It is a fake Apple computer, yet is a real computer because it runs the Windows software.

By now you must be wondering whether my gun is fake or real. Well, this is not a real Beretta or even a real gun. It is a model gun that doesn't fire bullets of any kind. Yet if I pointed it at somebody in broad daylight, he would be a fool to assume it is just a fake gun. So allow me put this fake gun back into my pocket.

When we say that the Antichrist is a contra Christ we have not said anything significant, for the world has always been contra Christ, just as all guns are contra-guns. But if I say that the Antichrist will be a pseudo Christ, I am saying something very significant. This is exactly what the Bible teaches in First John and elsewhere. The coming Antichrist will claim to be the real Christ, and that will make him extremely dangerous. He will not be like my fake gun, but will be a non-Beretta gun that is nonetheless a real gun that can fire real bullets.

The New Testament does not speak of the Antichrist as a contra Christ. The Lord Jesus speaks repeatedly of pseudo Christs (false Christs) in Matthew 24. The man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2 is not a contra Christ, for he will claim himself to be God.

How to prepare ourselves? How do you tell the true from the false? First, you need to pray for spiritual discernment. Second, you must get a firm grip of the word of God. Third, you must put on Christ at all times, like wearing a bulletproof jacket. If you take off Christ, you will lose your protective armor. If you put on Christ, he will be your armor, your protection, your beauty, your power, your glory, your authority.

Chapter 14

God's Kingship or Satan's?

I have been preaching a series of messages on the Antichrist, and this will be my last message. It is a vast subject, and I could continue on it for many more months. But we must wrap up today. I hope that the purpose of these messages has been fulfilled, such that we see the urgency of the matter and the dangers that lie ahead, and that our lives may be changed for the better. Many Christians live as if they have forever in this world, as though the Antichrist or even Christ himself won't be coming, so they pass their lives with a purposelessness that is thoroughly alarming.

Satan the dragon

Soon it will be Chinese New Year, and do you know which year will be coming up? Those of you who live in Hong Kong would know, but some in Canada might not. Soon it will be

the year of the dragon. To the Chinese people, the dragon is an impressive and glorious creature, indeed a mythical divine creature. The Chinese regard the emperor of China as the dragon. Chinese emperors used to put on the *longpao*, a royal robe with a great dragon on the front that marks the wearer as the son of heaven. Some women want to have their children born in the year of the dragon in the hope that when they grow up, they will be special.

The New Testament also has a concept of a dragon, and it is mentioned in only one book—Revelation—in which the dragon is mentioned 12 times.¹⁰ Revelation is of course the last book of the Bible. The rest of the New Testament does not mention the dragon even once, so it is only when we come to the last book of the Bible—the one that speaks of “the things that must soon take place” (Rev.1:1)—that suddenly there is frequent mention of the dragon. And this doesn’t happen until midway through Revelation. The dragon first appears in Revelation chapter 12 in which it is mentioned seven times, and this continues into chapter 13 in which it is mentioned three times. Hence ten of the twelve references to the dragon

¹⁰ In the New Testament, the Greek word *drakōn* occurs 12 times, all in the book of Revelation, in verses 12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2. Some Bibles such as ESV and NASB have an extra occurrence of “dragon” in Revelation 12:7, but it is inserted for clearer English, and is not found in the Greek text.

in the New Testament occur in these two chapters in the middle of Revelation. Near the end of Revelation, in chapter 20, the mighty dragon—Satan himself, enemy of God—is seized, bound, and thrown into the abyss, a pit.

The Bible does not underestimate the might of the dragon, a symbol of Satan. He is described as “a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems” (Rev.12:3). It is indeed an awesome creature that has seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on the seven heads.

The next chapter, Revelation 13, talks about the false Christ who is called the beast, and who looks similar to the dragon (Satan): “And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.” (Rev.13:1, ESV)

The beast—the false Christ—will look almost like the dragon, also with ten horns and seven heads, but this time there will be ten diadems (crowns) on the ten horns rather than seven diadems on the seven heads. It doesn't mean that the beast, the Antichrist, will actually look like that when he appears. This is symbolic language. Many have tried to make head or tail of Revelation, but here we have a simple clue, and it has to do with crowns.

The dragon (Satan) wears crowns, as does the Antichrist, the false Messiah. Both have seven heads and ten horns. The

difference is that the dragon will have seven crowns on the seven heads, and the Antichrist will have ten crowns on the ten horns.

The battle between Christ and Antichrist

Who else wears crowns in Revelation? In verse 4:4, the 24 elders in heaven wear crowns on their heads, and they cast them before the throne of God (v.10). They don't want to keep their crowns but offer them to God. In Revelation 19:12, we see an impressive figure riding on a white horse who is crowned. He has only one head, not seven, but on that head he wears many diadems (crowns). Do you grasp the message of Revelation? Do you understand the symbolism? It is a contest for crowns, for the kingship of this world. And Revelation predicts in symbolic language how the battle for the kingship of this world is going to be fought, and what the outcome will be. The final outcome is not in doubt, for the dragon with the seven crowns will be cast into the bottomless pit. Then the one who has many diadems, the king of kings and lord of lords, will rule the earth.

Do you realize that the battle is raging right now, fought in heaven and on earth, and between God and Satan through their representatives? Their supreme representatives in the last days will be Christ and Antichrist. That is when the battle will reach its climax, with Christ at war against Antichrist.

But even before that takes place, there are already many antichrists in the world today. Even in this assembly hall, some are on one side of the battle, some are on the other side. You and I are on one side of the battle or the other side. You know where you stand, or ought to know. Are you on God's side, fighting for his kingdom to be established on earth? Do you pray, "Father, may your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth and in my life." Or do you even care who is king so long as you live a good life in your remaining years? You will have to choose sides: God or Satan.

The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). The whole world—the people of the world—are living under the power of the dragon.

If you have not consciously and deliberately renounced the kingship of Satan, then to this day you are still his subject. To this day you are still in his kingdom and under his power. You don't need to make any deliberate choice or do anything to remain a subject of the dragon or a citizen of Satan's kingdom. To use an analogy, if you are born in the United Kingdom, you are automatically a citizen of the United Kingdom. You don't need to file an application for UK citizenship. In the same way, if you are born into the world, you are already a citizen of Satan's kingdom.

But you need to submit an application to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. The tricky part is that it is hard to get

your application approved. Isn't that ironic? We would think that since the whole world lies in the power of Satan, God would be desperate to get more citizens into his numerically smaller kingdom (cf. Mt. 7:14). We would expect God to put up a billboard: "Everyone is welcome to apply. You will enjoy many benefits in the kingdom of God." But what happens when you apply? God will examine you and say, "Hmm, your application is not approved." So you say, "Really? I gave God face and honor by my act of applying, yet he turns me down!"

We are even told that we need to take up our cross daily. "What!? The cross? Satan never asks anyone to take up the cross. He can give you the kingdoms of the world if you follow him. Burn some incense and your business will shoot up. Forcing the cross on us is way overboard!"

You and I were born into Satan's kingdom, but to get into God's kingdom, we must "strive to enter by the narrow gate." And what happens after that? You will discover that you are no longer your own lord as in the past when you lived in Satan's kingdom. Now you have to obey God and answer to him. But Satan believes in free enterprise in which you run your own show.

The other day I saw a book on how to make people do what you want them to do, yet make them think they are doing what they want. That is superb psychology, so clever and deceptive! Satan is a master psychologist, but Jesus refuses to practice psychology. Satan says, "Follow me and do what

you like. You will be the boss of your own little kingdom, with the enjoyments of life.”

But when you enter the kingdom of God, you are told you are a slave of God. “What? A slave? I don’t like being a slave.” But without being a slave, you don’t become a citizen of God’s kingdom, much less become a son of God. In the New Testament, you don’t become a son without first becoming a slave. Some preachers ignore the slavery part and stress the sonship part. There are preachers who want to give you a passport to the kingdom of heaven that doesn’t require you to take up the cross. Satan will tell you, “Don’t be a fool. Take a look at my kingdom. The whole world is mine. Follow me and you will get the world. Follow Jesus and all you get is heaven.”

In the remainder of this message, I will talk about the kingdom or kingship of God, and base it on Matthew 24. God’s kingship is wonderful, but if you think you will get something for nothing, keep in mind that the pearl of great price will cost you everything.

The key to understanding not just Revelation but the whole New Testament is this central question: Will you have God as King, or will you remain under Satan’s kingship? You are under Satan’s kingship by default, so you don’t need to make a conscious choice to remain in his kingdom. But not making a choice is already making a choice for Satan. If you

want to stay in Satan's kingdom, you don't have to do a thing. Just ignore my message, and carry on happily in Satan's kingdom. But if you want to enter God's kingdom, you will have to make a deliberate and costly choice. Then God will become the king of your life, and wonderful things will happen.

The unity of Matthew chapters 23, 24, 25

Matthew chapters 23, 24, 25 are not separate units, but one integrated unit in the Lord's teaching. Common themes run through the three chapters, including the kingship of God. And in the middle of this unit is Matthew 24 which talks about the end times and notably the pseudo Messiah, the false Christ, the Antichrist.

The preceding chapter, Matthew 23, speaks of hypocrites who profess God as their king, yet their lives show that God is not their king. The church is full of people who claim God as their king, but they are just as hypocritical as the Pharisees. By the way they talk, the way they think, the way they live, you can tell that God is not king of their lives. That is what Jesus says to the Pharisees at the start of Matthew 23. They teach God's word and God's law, but their lives betray their real self. They are tombs painted white on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones.

If you want to be a Christian, please don't be this kind of Christian. There are already too many stumbling blocks in the world. If you don't want to live under God's kingship, why not remain in Satan's kingdom without ever claiming to be living under God's kingship? Every day you will be denying God in your school or office.

In the latter part of Matthew chapter 24, in the parable of the unfaithful servant (Mt. 24:45–51), there is a servant of God who beats up his fellow servants. As a servant of God, either a pastor, a bishop, or someone with religious authority, he is filled with a sense of self-importance. He says, "My master's coming is delayed" (v.48), so he abuses the people entrusted to his care. This Christian leader is every bit as bad as the Pharisees.

Then Jesus gives another parable, that of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1–13). Here we see ten Christians, among whom are five foolish virgins whose lights were shining, but they ran out of oil and stopped shining. You may be one of those who shone with a certain light, but as the darkness started pressing around you, your light began to dim, and you ran out of oil because you did not endure. That is why the Lord Jesus says that before you think of entering the kingdom of God, count the cost as to whether you can endure to the end.

The last part of Matthew 25, in verses 31–46, is the parable of the sheep and the goats that are gathered before the Lord

Jesus, king and judge, seated on his glorious throne. We see again that the theme of kingship spans all three chapters. The Lord Jesus judges the goats, the false Christians who look like sheep but are not. Do they believe in Jesus? Yes, for they call him Lord and Master. They even call out to him, “Lord, Lord,” but Jesus says, “Don’t call me Lord, for I don’t know you. Your life has been a disgrace, and you have stumbled many in your lifetime.”

Wars and rumors of wars, and the days of Noah

We now come to Matthew 24, an interesting chapter in which Jesus prophesies wars and rumors of wars (v.6) in a deteriorating world. There have always been wars throughout human history, so the point of this prophecy is that wars will intensify and become more frequent in the last days.

In contrast to the wars and rumors of wars at the start of Matthew 24, we see a starkly different situation towards the end of the chapter. Here Jesus says that the coming of the Son of Man will be like the days of Noah (vv.37ff). He depicts Noah’s days not in terms of violence but in terms of human activities such as eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. There is nothing inherently wrong with these activities, but the problem is that the generation of Noah was concerned only with earthly things. Is there anything wrong with getting more degrees and earning more money? It all

seems harmless, but the problem is that we are preoccupied with transient things and ignore the eternal things.

Anyone who lives like that is under Satan's kingship. The world is the only domain that Satan still possesses, and he wants you to set your minds on this world. He will try to divert your attention from the kingdom of God, which he depicts as airy-fairy, without telling you that the world is passing away even if it looks real and tangible.

Jesus depicts Noah's generation as peace time rather than war, with human activities such as eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. How do we reconcile this picture of peace with that of wars and rumors of wars? How can war and peace coexist? Right now in 1988, is the world in peace or at war? What is your answer? You may say, "I am not experiencing war around me, so we must be living in relative peace." But that is out of touch with what is happening in the world. A Christian ought to read not only his Bible but also the newspapers.

The South China Morning Post of January 25, 1988, has a report on the global military expenditures in the year 1987. Do you know how much the world spent on weapons and armies in 1987, in this so-called peace time? It boggles the mind: *930 billion U.S. dollars*. I cannot even input the 12 digits into my calculator. This is peace time? The report did some calculations for us: 1.8 million U.S. dollars spent every

minute. And six countries in the world account for 75% of the global military spending of 930 billion U.S. dollars. It also says that the global military outlay for the preceding year, 1986, was 880 billion U.S. dollars, which means that there was an increase in just one year of 50 billion U.S. dollars for weapons and armies. Are we living in peace or are we living in war?

The report says that in 1987, the nuclear inventories of the two superpowers, USA and USSR, increased at the rate of 16 nuclear bombs per week, or more than two new bombs daily. The total destructive power of all nuclear weapons in 1987 is 2,600 times the combined explosive power of *all* the armaments in the world in *all* World War II. You have probably seen WWII newsreels of the carpet bombings of Germany and Japan. I visited Germany immediately after WWII as a young boy, and was shocked by what I saw. Germany was absolutely flattened by the Allied bombings. Yet the destructive power of the nuclear weapons today is 2,600 times that of the entire WWII. So are we are living in peace time?

The main point of Matthew 24 is that wars and rumors of war will intensify year after year, as suggested by this newspaper report. So the year of the dragon will be an ominous year, won't it? We will probably add another 50 billion dollars to the global military expenditure this coming year.

The Bible is truly amazing. Read your Bible and the newspapers, and if you have eyes to see, you will be amazed by how God's word is being fulfilled before our eyes.

Why do some say that the Antichrist is a contra Christ?

In my last message, I pulled out a pistol to everyone's shock, in order to illustrate a point. Of course everyone breathed a sigh of relief when I said it was a fake gun, though it looked dreadfully similar to a real gun. In fact that toy gun costs only \$4 U.S. and fires plastic pellets. Yet criminals can rob banks with this gun because it looks real.

What was the point of that illustration? It was to drive home the important distinction between a contra Christ and a pseudo Christ. You will not find anywhere in Matthew 24 any reference to a contra Christ, but there are several mentions of pseudo Christs or pseudo prophets. The stress is on the falseness of the pseudo Christs.

Strangely enough, the New Testament says nothing whatsoever about a contra Christ. So where did this teaching come from? I am fearful about these last days in which false teaching goes around parading itself as true teaching, just as the false Christ will parade himself as the true Christ. He is

an imitation Christ, a counterfeit Christ, yet he will deceive many with his falsehood.

I get more and more puzzled when I read books on the Antichrist that I had bought from Christian bookstores. Why do these books teach a contra Christ when in Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 you cannot find anything about a contra Christ? Or for that matter, the rest of the New Testament?

The answer is simple. The whole exposition of a contra Christ derives from a certain interpretation of Daniel, mainly Daniel chapter 7 and portions of two or three other chapters. In this interpretation of Daniel, the Antichrist is said to be modeled on king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, a detestable figure whose coming was predicted by Daniel in a prophecy that was fulfilled in history. Matthew 24:15 says, "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place ..." (ESV). Modern commentators assume that because Jesus specifically mentions the abomination of desolation, therefore the whole sequence of events recorded in Daniel will somehow be repeated once more in the last days, repeating all the events leading up to Antiochus Epiphanes. That assumption has not been proven, and every attempt to do so will fail because there is simply no support for it in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of *one and only one event* from Daniel that will be repeated in the last days: the desecration of the temple by an abomination in the temple. It doesn't mean that the whole sequence of events in

Daniel will be repeated. Moreover, the abomination of desolation will take place specifically within the temple "in the holy place" (Mt.24:15).

Some will say that the beast (singular) in Revelation 13 is similar to the beasts (plural) in Daniel 7, but there is a key difference. Daniel 7:3–7 speaks of four separate beasts in sequence, one after another, but there is no such sequence of beasts in Revelation 13. The beast in Revelation 13:2 is just one beast, not four beasts, and is a composite of four animals. There is no indication that apostle John sees the sequence of events in Daniel 7 leading up to Antiochus Epiphanes being repeated in the last days.

Another reason for rejecting the idea of a purely contra Christ is that any teaching that stresses a contra Christ will of necessity stress persecution as the main aspect of Antichrist's work. A contra Christ can only be a *contra Christian* because Christ is now at the right hand of the Father, and out of the reach of the Antichrist. So the contra Christ is really a *contra Christian*, since the emphasis is on persecuting Christians. There has always been persecution from the beginning of the church, and we don't deny that. But the dangerous aspect of the Antichrist is not persecution but *deception*, and this is what Jesus warns us of several times in Matthew 24 (in which the word "mislead" occurs in verses 4, 5, 11, 24). He says in verse 4, "See to it that no one misleads

you”; this is in fact the opening sentence of his whole discourse on the last days. The Lord’s concern is always with the danger of *deception*. This is also Paul’s concern in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians, in which the real danger is deception rather than persecution (“let no one deceive you in any way,” v.3). In the entire chapter, Paul *never* mentions the persecution of the saints. In Revelation 13, the signs, wonders and miracles are designed to deceive; persecution will then come to the saints who see through the deception.

The issue comes down to emphasis. Those who teach a contra Christ would focus on persecution and see deception as a secondary concern. But those who teach a pseudo Christ will emphasize both deception and persecution, with greater emphasis on deception.

The Antichrist will be a Jew

Another reason for teaching a pseudo Christ rather than a contra Christ is that a contra Christ can be a Jew or a Gentile, but a pseudo Christ can only be a Jew. Anyone who claims to be Christ or the Messiah can only be a Jew, for “Messiah” is the Jewish title of the promised Jewish king from the line of David. No one can meet that requirement unless he is a Jew. That greatly narrows the field.

Anyone who is familiar with early church history would know of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon and a disciple of Polycarp,

who in turn was a disciple of the very apostle John who wrote about the Antichrist in his letters. Irenaeus taught that the Antichrist, the pseudo Christ, will be a Jew. In fact, many of the very early church fathers taught this, with few exceptions. The reason is not hard to see. The early church was composed of Jews and Gentiles, with Jews predominating in many places. But over the years, the Jewish component in the church became smaller and smaller, and almost disappeared from a church that had become predominantly Gentile. One of the great tragedies of the church is that it failed to reach the Jews with the gospel, and eventually excluded them almost completely. I have visited Israel many times, and hope to do what I can to reverse that situation. We owe the gospel to the Jews.

Just as the Jews disappeared from the church, so the teaching of a *Jewish* Antichrist disappeared from the church. As a result we feel that we can include Gentiles as candidates for the Antichrist, leading to wild speculations that he might be Antiochus, Napoleon, Hitler, Gorbachev, or Bill Gates. But the king promised by God—the Messiah who will rule not only over Israel but the whole world—will be from the line of David. If the Antichrist claims to be the promised Messiah he will have to be a Jew.

Some reject the idea that the Antichrist will be a Jew for the reason that the Antichrist will blaspheme God, and it is

unimaginable that any Jew would blaspheme God and set himself up as God at the temple. This is to misunderstand the Jews, for the Jews are no different from the Gentiles in this respect. We only have to recall that Communism—the most powerful atheistic system in the world, and one that denies God—was founded by two Jews, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

There is also the case of Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great, in Acts 12:20–23. (The name Herod refers not just to one king but a bloodline of kings.) Despite having Jewish blood, Agrippa accepted divine honors when the people shouted, “The voice of a god, and not of a man.” So an angel of the Lord struck him down. The fact that Agrippa had Jewish blood and was of Jewish descent, did not deter him from seeking to be proclaimed God.

In speaking of Herod, we can bring in an important factor. In Jewish thinking, the fact that your father is a Jew does not make you a Jew, but if your mother is a Jew, you will be counted as a Jew. The Herods had Jewish blood on their mother’s side, so the Jews had to grudgingly admit that the hated Herods were Jewish.

The Antichrist will be Jewish on his mother’s side. But what about his father’s side? Even if his father is Gentile, the son would still retain his Jewishness from his mother. The following scenario is plausible: From his mother’s side, the Antichrist would be accepted as a Jew. But if the Antichrist

has a Gentile father, the son would also be acceptable to Gentiles. The Antichrist would then be acceptable to both Jews and Gentiles.

I could preach many more messages on the Antichrist, but we must wrap up. We saw that the battle is over kingship. On one side is Satan's kingship and his representative the Antichrist, the false Christ, the pseudo Christ. On the other side is God's kingship and his representative Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. Many won't be able to tell Antichrist from Christ, with there being many parallels between them such as the doing of signs and wonders. In this battle over kingship, the Antichrist, the pseudo Christ, will be like a gang leader who tries to supplant the real king, Jesus Christ.

I recently read a book called *Yakuza*. The Yakuza is the Japanese equivalent of the triads in Hong Kong. Criminal gangs operate in Japan despite the fact the Japanese are nice and polite people.

I get embarrassed every time I go to Japan. The Japanese would bow to me and speak to me in Japanese. At an airport, I was about to ask a flight attendant which boarding gate I should go to, when she bowed to me and spoke in Japanese. When I go on a train in Japan they talk to me in Japanese; when I reply in English, they would be wondering why this Japanese doesn't speak Japanese.

The Japanese people are so polite that it is hard to imagine that gangs operate in Japan. But this book of nearly 500 pages tells us the surprising truth about the Yakuza. It was written by The Center for Investigative Reporting that does investigative reporting at great risk to themselves. The Yakuza are so powerful that they influence government decisions. According to this book, the Prime Minister and his cabinet would consult the Yakuza. The Yakuza even have occasional access to the Emperor himself.

The Yakuza control 26,000 legal businesses in Japan, and countless more illegal businesses. Their annual revenue, while not known with accuracy, is possibly 22 billion U.S. dollars a year. They control gambling, street activities, and, above all, drug trafficking which brings in over 50% of their income.

Many Japanese people respect these gangsters as heirs of the ancient Samurai tradition. The Yakuza would occasionally carry samurai swords with them, with which they kill people, though very seldom today. They have special tattoos on their body. They are so loyal to their leaders (Christians can learn loyalty to God from the Yakuza) that some would chop off the tip of their little finger, wrap it in cloth, and present it to their leaders as a token of their loyalty. One reason the organization is so powerful is that it is bound by an ardent loyalty to one another and to the leaders. The Yakuza are disciplined, well-organized, and loyal to one

another (there are 110,000 known Yakuza members). If you go to Japan and see a finger that is missing its tip, you may be looking at a Yakuza.

An interesting thing is their patriotism to the Samurai tradition. The Yakuza are patriotic to their country, and many fought in the Japanese army in World War II. Those who survived the war came back with the military experience that proved invaluable to the Yakuza organization.

I conclude on this point: Don't think that because the Antichrist or the pseudo Christ is the man of lawlessness, he will behave in an openly lawless way. His lawlessness will not be displayed publicly, at least not initially, for the Antichrist seeks the cover of legitimacy as part of his strategy of deception.

The book I mentioned has photographs of past Yakuza bosses, and they all look like perfect gentleman. They are dressed in smart suits, and have a gentlemanly demeanor. If you meet them on the streets, their followers too are dressed in business suits, so you would not realize that they are criminals.

When the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, appears, he will behave in a lawful manner. Like the Yakuza, his lawlessness is under cover. That is what makes the pseudo Christ so dangerous.

May God give you the courage to renounce your citizenship with the kingdom of Satan and his false Christ, and to speedily, before it is too late, transfer your loyalty and citizenship to God, to his kingdom, and to his Messiah King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Appendix

The Lexical Meaning of *Anti*

We quote from two authoritative references to establish the meaning of the Greek word *anti* (as in *Antichrist*). Our first reference is *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* by Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich (BDAG, 3rd edition). This lexicon gives the following five definitions of *anti*, here quoted verbatim from the lexicon, omitting sources and references:

1. indicating that one person or thing is, or is to be, replaced by another, *instead of, in place of*
2. indicating that one thing is equiv. to another, *for, as, in place of*
3. indicating a process of intervention. Gen 44:33 shows how the sense 'in place of,' can develop into *in behalf of, for someone*

4. indicating the reason for someth., *because of, for the purpose of*
5. indicating result, w. implication of being a replacement for someth., *wherefore, therefore, so then*

Our second reference is *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Kittel and Friedrich. For brevity, we quote not from the ten-volume set (which uses Greek script that few can read) but from the one-volume abridgment by Geoffrey Bromiley (which uses transliterated Greek). The definition of *anti* is here quoted in its entirety:

Antí [in place of]

A preposition from the Hellenistic period, *antí* does not have the sense “over against” in the NT but is used for a. “in place of” to denote a replacement or equivalent (Rom.12:17; 1 Th.5:15; 1 Pet.3:9; Heb.12:16), or a similarity (1 Cor.11:15). From this develop the senses b. “on behalf of” in Mt.17:27 or “to the account of” and c. “for the sake of” or “for this cause” (Eph.5:31), “because” (2 Th.2:10—*antí toutou*). In Mk.10:45 the position of *antí pollón* (“for many”) shows that it goes with *lýtron* rather than *doúnai* and thus has sense a.: The sacrificed life of Jesus is a sufficient price to redeem many. Even if we put it with *doúnai* and give it sense b., it still carries a vicarious significance, for Jesus is then giving his life “on behalf of” the forfeited life of the many.

Conclusion: Against our expectation as speakers of English who are familiar with terms such as anti-government or anti-aircraft, the sense of *against* or *opposition* does not appear in any of the definitions of *anti* offered by these two standard and authoritative references.

It is true that a pseudo Christ is also some kind of contra Christ, since a false Christ acts in a way that seeks to undermine Christ. But this kind of opposition is hidden rather than overt. The Antichrist opposes Christ, but outwardly he is a pseudo Christ rather than a contra Christ.

It is important to base our understanding of “Antichrist” on the Greek rather than the English because the English “Antichrist” is merely a *transliteration* of the Greek word *antichristos*.

The term “Antichrist” is even more misleading in Chinese Bibles because here we are no longer dealing with a straightforward transliteration. The term 敌基督 (*di jidu*) explicitly declares the Antichrist to be an “enemy of Christ”. This is an arbitrary interpretation, and a wrong one at that, because the sense of “enemy” or “opposition” is secondary (i.e., not the primary or dominant meaning of *anti* in the New Testament).



