

PART III

IDENTIFYING THE PROTAGONIST AND ANTAGONIST

The first thing to do in any book is find the two opposing sides. There are always two sides, diametrically opposed and never overlapping. What one side considers good the other considers evil, and vice-versa.

In 1 John it is quite simple to identify these. Typically an author will identify himself clearly and also place the antagonist's description in one particular section. John clearly identifies himself in one passage, and the antagonist in two passages, 2:18-22 and 4:1-6 (although they will be alluded to in multiple places throughout the epistles).

The Protagonist: The Author an Apostle

Of course, in an epistle, the protagonist (or good character) is the inspired author, who represents God and God's theology. He is advocating truth and the interpreter must precisely identify him and his theology. John is mentioned throughout the epistle as an apostle, identified by the use of the first person pronoun, "we" and "us." These are references to the apostles of whom John is a part.⁴

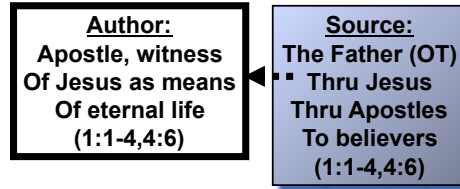
John and the apostles are a special class of people different than just regular believers. They are the ones who have witnessed the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus and now have the revealed word of God and teach the believers this truth. In other words, the believers have no access to see Jesus' words and works and thus to prove he is the Messiah. The apostles fulfill this function so that believers who follow them will be able to believe in the Messiah that they have seen (John 20:31).

Now John identifies himself very clearly in the first three verses of the epistle (1:1-3). He states that he (as part of the apostles, "we") eye-witnessed the "(eternal) life," which was the character of God, in Jesus. The purpose of Jesus' arrival as this "eternal life," was so that through belief (5:13), one could have this life for themselves and thus have "commonality" (e.g., fellowship) with Jesus as access to the Father.

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life--² and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was revealed to us--³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have commonality with us; and indeed our commonality is with the Father, and with

⁴ To understand the function of apostles, refer to the "Introduction to Epistles," at www.TheBiblicalStory.org/baylis/resources/

His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)



Apostles are Eyewitnesses to Messiah as the Revelation of God

Probably the most important thing that must be established with apostolic writers is that they are unique from anyone else that has ever been, or ever will be. They are similar to prophets, except they are eye-witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus, rather than looking forward to Him.

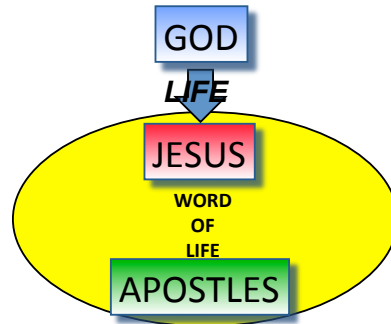
²³ Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed *are* the eyes which see the things you see, ²⁴ for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see *them*, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear *them*." (Luke 10:23-24)

They were eyewitnesses to Jesus' words and works. From the beginning of time man had waited for the Messiah to appear and deliver mankind, and now John and 11 other disciples were privileged to be these sovereignly chosen observers.

These then uniquely were able to validate that Jesus was indeed the One who had been awaited by the Old Testament (John 20:31).

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our

eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- (1 John 1:1-2).

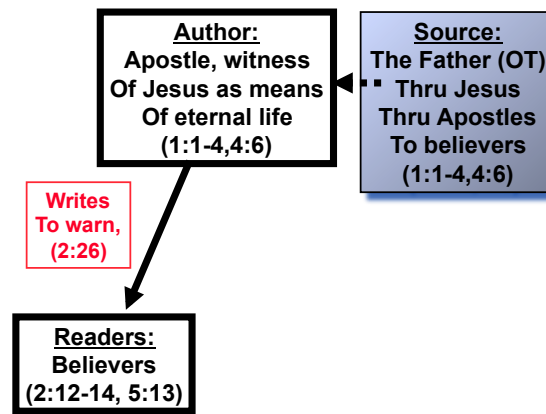


APOSTLES

Apostles Believe in the One they Eye-witnessed

In addition, these eyewitnesses not only saw that Jesus was the Christ, but put their trust in Him as well. Thus they saw the “eternal life” in Jesus and also received it by believing in Him. Thus believers, who hear the testimony of the apostles, can also be as they are, that is, believers and possessors of “eternal life.”

¹⁶ We have come to know and have believed the love, which God has for us. (1 John 4:16)

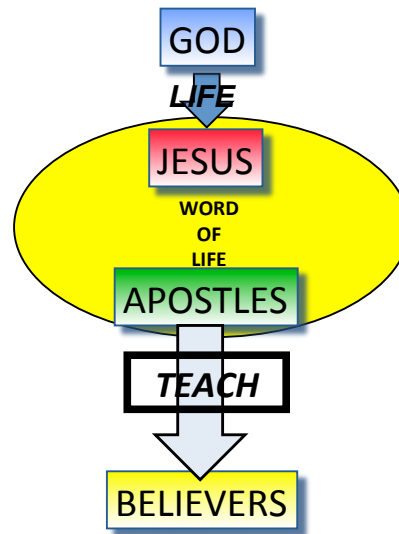
Apostles are Proclaimers of the Eyewitness Testimony to the Readers

Now these men pass on what they have seen and experienced to the believers who are to follow them. So the Epistle of 1 John is exactly this, eyewitness testimony by the apostle to the believers who have believed their testimony and have come to believe in the same One in whom the apostles believed.

³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, (1 John 1:3)

⁵ This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you (1 John 1:5)

¹³ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)



APOSTLES

Apostles are The Means by Which the Readers May Know the Father and the Son

It is important to establish that the apostolic testimony is the only way that a believer may know this Jesus as the Christ. By knowing the apostolic eyewitness, they like the apostles, can have a relationship with Jesus and the Father.

so that you too may have commonality with us; and indeed our commonality is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3).

Apostles Determine who are the True “Children of God” and “Children of the Devil”

One of the most important things to understand in this epistle is that the apostles’ testimony of Jesus (i.e., the Gospels) is the criteria by which the true “children of God” are determined. In other words the antagonists are claiming to be “children of God,” and so are John’s readers. So he tells his readers that the apostles’ doctrine (“we,” “us”) is the only determiner. In both 2:19 and 4:6, John specifically identifies the apostles (“we,” “us”) as the means by which anyone is determined to actually have access to the Father. Without the apostolic eyewitness and the reception of it, one relegates themselves to the category as a “child of the devil,” since they do not have the “eternal life” required to enter the kingdom. Without believing the apostolic eyewitness, one is left to his own sources of access to the father, which are all from the devil.

¹⁹ They went out from us,⁵ but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)

⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

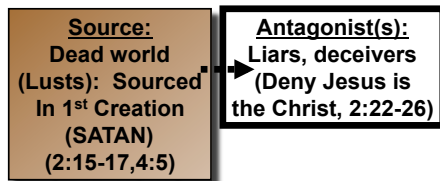
⁵ This verse is broadly used to errantly identify false professors of Christianity, that is, if one departs from a congregation then it shows they were never Christians, even though they profess to be. There are two problems with this. First of all, the “us” is not the congregation or the church, but the apostles. They are the determiners in this book (see 4:6, 1:1-4), not the church. Churches are never the determiners, but only their doctrine, which is the apostolic doctrine. Churches are subject to deception, as is the one to whom John is writing (see 2:26), and thus cannot be the absolute determiner. This problem comes about because the reader too easily changes the “us” to mean the reader instead of the apostles. The reader is identified by the second person “you.” In addition, the “they” is antichrists (see 2:18), not a professor of Christianity. These antichrists are deniers of Jesus as the Christ (see 2:22-23, which identifies them as rejecting the apostolic doctrine). They do not profess Jesus as the Christ, nor ever have, so they cannot be “professors” of Christianity. These antichrists deny Jesus as the Christ when they were confronted by the apostolic doctrine and rejected it (“went out”). The issue is whether they have access to God the Father and they claim they have access to God some other way than Jesus.

The Antagonist: Antichrists, False Teachers

In the Book of 1 John, the False Teachers and Antichrists are a special class of unbelievers. They are those who teach the world (i.e., rejecters of God’s revelation), and the world listens to them. They are the opposite of the apostles. They are completely described in 2:19-22 and 4:1-6.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. . . . (1 John 2:18)

. . . because many false prophets have gone out into the world . . . They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. (4:5)

The False Teachers are the “Children of the Devil” (Satan)

In a sharp contrast to the apostles (“we are from God . . .,” 4:6), John declares that they are from the world (“they are from the world . . .,” 4:5). “The world,” John declares, is sourced from Satan (“the whole world lies in the evil one,” 5:19). Thus their doctrine is from Satan passed through the first Adam to his children, and thus they are in the family of Satan.

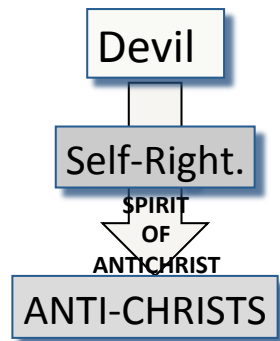
The “antichrists” are defined as those who are “seed of the serpent” from

Genesis 3:15, and who are followers of Satan, the serpent of old. They were prophesied to oppose the “Seed of the Woman” who was coming, and when He came they would kill Him (“strike Him on the heel”). Following that they would continue to hate and kill the followers of the Christ.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)

⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. (1 John 4:5)

¹⁰ By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not do righteousness⁶ is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. ¹¹ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; ¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous (1 John 3:10-12)



FALSE TEACHERS

⁶ This will be defined later as “belief in Messiah,” as can be seen in 3:12 where Abel’s deeds were “righteous.” That was his sacrifice, which was his demonstration of belief in Messiah to come.

The False Teachers Believe in Self-Justification Through Works (of the Law)

John compares himself (the apostles) to the false teachers in 1:5—2:1, and states the contrast between them and the false teachers. While John claims forgiveness through Christ, the alternative false teachers claim that they have self-justification (“If we say that we have no sin . . . have not sinned,” 1:6, 8), through the Law (or some other self-justification method of works righteousness). The author even states they are like Cain, who was self-righteous in his approach to God, believing in his own invention as a way to God.

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1Jo 1:6, 8, 10)

¹² not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil . . .⁷

The False Teachers Reject Jesus Christ as the Means to the Father

However, while they do seek to access God on some self-serving basis, they directly oppose the imputation of righteousness and the forgiveness of sin through Jesus as the Christ of Psalm 2. This is their clear identity, opposing Jesus Christ, through the apostles, as the only means of access to the Father.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. . . .

²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:18, 22-23)

⁷ Cain’s evil deed(s) were his sacrifice, which was a rejection of the Messianic revelation of Genesis 3:15. By sacrificing his vegetables, which were the works of his hands, he was proclaiming a self-effort approach to Messiah, which had not been revealed by God as the way to Him. Abel, by contrast, sacrificed as God had directed only a few verses earlier, as a reflection of His coming Messiah, in whom Abel put His trust. See Hebrews 11:4, which reflects this statement regarding Cain and Abel.

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, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4:2-3)

Since they reject the Father by rejecting the means by which their sins are forgiven, the Son, they remain in death and are not “Children of God.” This can be seen by the alternating statements of 1:6 and 2:1 (“we have no sin,” “we have not sinned”), where the true “Children of God” have forgiveness through the Son.

Comparison of the Antagonists Against the Apostles

- **The Antagonists: Claim a Relationship With God without the Son**

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

- **The Apostles: Claim Jesus blood cleanses sin**

⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

- **The Antagonists: Claim they have no sin**

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

- **The Apostles: Claim Forgiveness and cleansing from God from sin**

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- **The Antagonists: Claim they have not sinned**

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

- **The Apostles: Claim Jesus is the Advocate for sinners**

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous;

The False Teachers are Identified by their Rejection of the Apostles

Because of their justification by works, they reject Jesus as identified in the apostolic doctrine. So, their identity in this book is very clear, they reject the apostles' doctrine of access to the Father through Jesus Christ alone.

In 2:19, the identity of the antichrists, those who deny Christ (2:22), is that they “went out” from the apostles. The “went out” is not an indicator of the fact that they were ever “with” the apostles in the sense of believing, but that they were confronted by the apostolic doctrine and rejected it. The origination of this phrase is from Cain who “went out” from the presence of God in Genesis 4:24. Cain was never a “truster” of God, but was confronted by the revelation of God and rejected it. Thus, while he was offered the opportunity to become identified as one of God’s children, he showed that he was not by rejecting and thus “went out.”

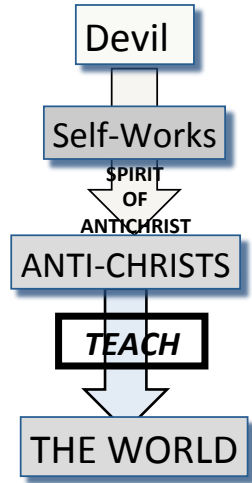
¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1Jo 2:19 NAU)

⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1Jo 4:1-6 NAU)

The False Teachers are the Means by Which the World is Taught

These false teachers are in a particular group, different than those in the world, that is, the larger group of unbelievers, in that they are advocates of this false doctrine of rejection of Jesus Christ. Thus, they are the teachers of the false doctrine and endorse the dying doctrines of Satan to the world, which are those of self-righteousness as access to God.

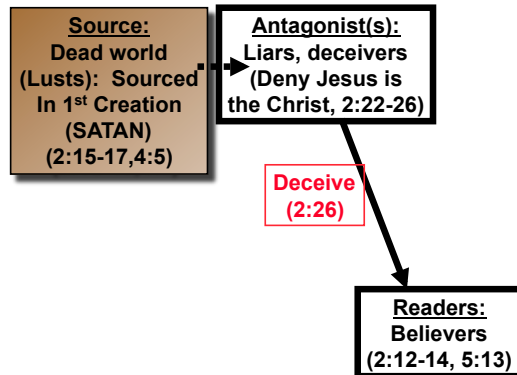
⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. (1Jo 4:5 NAU)



FALSE TEACHERS

**The Antagonist’s Try to Deceive the Believers
 to Reject Christ for the Works of the Law**

What is actually happening in this book is that these antagonists, who influence the old dying world, now are moving to drag the Christians from believing in Jesus as the only access to the Father. They are, like the original serpent Satan, trying to deceive Christians to return to their own efforts (works of the Law) to reach God.

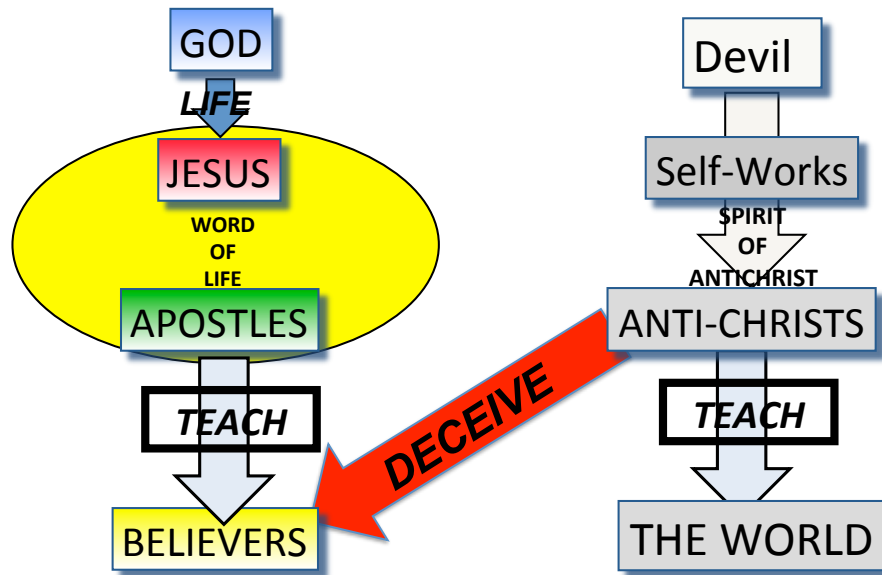


These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.
(1 John 2:26)

Little children, make sure no one deceives you (1 John 3:7)

The Conflict: Apostles' Doctrine Versus the False Teachers' Doctrine

The “conflict” of any narrative, of any epistle, defines the problem of the book and thus also narrows the purpose, which is to correct the problem. Thus, this particular problem in 1 John is that these antichrists are confronting those who have believed in Jesus Christ (5:13) that they are wrong and should revert back to the works of the Law (2:26, “deceive you”). Thus these antichrists, these false prophets, are like Satan of old, and trying to deceive the believers once more as Satan did to Eve.

**APOSTLES**

In 2:15-17, John states that these believers are being deceived the same way as Eve, and recalls her temptation. She was tempted directly by the Satanically driven serpent, but this time the believers are being tempted by the Satanically driven antichrists, or false prophets. Returning to Eve’s temptation in Genesis 3:6 it says,

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Now John warns the believers of the same thing, that they do not listen to these followers of the serpent, Satan.

¹⁵ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who

does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

But that is not all the Genesis comparison that John makes to his contemporary situation. John continues in 2:18 with the comparison to Genesis 3 as he identifies these antichrists (the new seeds of the serpent) as tempting believers to reject the revelation of God (as the serpent deceived Eve). However, in Genesis 4, Satan tempted Cain to justify himself by his works. So Cain rejected God’s promise of Messiah, and having rejected God’s promised hope, “went out” (Genesis 4:16) from the presence of God. Like Cain “went out” from God, these antichrists “went out” from the apostles (who reveal Jesus), demonstrating their source as Satanic, and their hope was in the dead world of the first Adam. The believers hope, like Abel’s, is in the Messiah, Jesus.

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. ²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. ²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:18-23)

Finally, in 2:26, he caps off this section by warning them that these antichrists (serpents) are trying to deceive them (like Satan to both Eve and Cain).

²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (1 John 2:26)

