

The Fifth Column

The Many Faces of Evil – Part VII

Revelation 13:11-15

Introduction

In 1939, as the Spanish Civil War was coming to a close, General Mola was making his final plans to attack Madrid. Someone asked him which of his four columns would be the first to enter the city. He responded with the now famous words that “the fifth column” would be first. General Mola’s hopes were pinned on the help of rebel sympathizers living among the population inside the city of Madrid. They were already at work behind Loyalist lines, aiding his cause and preparing for the overthrow of Madrid.

Since this time, the phrase “the fifth column” has been used worldwide to describe people who assist the enemy from within.ⁱ

The biblical term for “the fifth column” is the word “apostate”. An apostate is someone who masquerades for a while within the body of believers, but eventually reveals his false belief.

This is the one who says they know Christ and comes to church, but, at some point, announces they do not believe the Bible anymore, leaves the church, and denies Christ for the rest of their lives.

John the apostle wrote about these people in I John 2:19 when he describes them and explains,

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.

In light of our study in Revelation 13 regarding the antichrist, I found it especially interesting that John continues in this same paragraph, in verses 21-22, to say,

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

Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ [that is, the Messiah – God in the flesh]? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.

So John writes about those who have left the church – apostates who deny the truth about Christ.

Even worse than these are the ones who never leave the church. They create a fifth column and are, in reality, in league with the enemy of the church.

Worse yet are those who are supposed to be shepherds; those who are in leadership, but who, in reality, lead the sheep astray.

This was Paul’s warning to the Ephesian elders when he said to them to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock because,

. . . from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:30)

The word for “perverse” (διαστρεφω) can be translated, “to twist or distort”. In other words, these apostates hide under the guise of true spirituality. They seem sound and true, but they, in fact, twist the truth and distort its meaning; they use the same terminology of scripture but they have a different dictionary.

I agree with one author who wrote that it does not take much effort to see that we live in a generation of surging apostasy.ⁱⁱ

Paul wrote to Titus that those who have turned away from the truth are defiled and unbelieving,

They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him . . . (Titus 1:15-16)

These are the ones Paul warned the church in every generation about – this is the ever present fifth column; this is those from within who collaborate with the enemy. These are the ones who water down the gospel and denigrate the mission of the church into nothing more than an inoffensive doctrine in which everyone can be included and everyone can go to heaven with anything-goes lifestyles – in fact, everyone can go to heaven in whichever way they want to go.

As the world finally unites into one global government and one global economy, we also discover in John’s vision of the Tribulation, the rise of a one-world religion. It begins with the acceptance of every religion, as long as no religion excludes the validity of another religion.

This will be a time in which inclusivism and pluralism will be the rage. Everyone will have a god and every god will be validated.

Halfway through the Tribulation, as we will see in Revelation chapter 13, the happy days of “every god will do” will morph into a religion with only one god – the antichrist, and every human being on the planet will be required to worship him, or die.

So the days leading up to the emergence of the antichrist will be marked by many antichrists – or the spirit of antichrist, which will deny the truth of Christ’s exclusive claim to be God in the flesh (I John 4:3).

The spirit of antichrist will especially hate this exclusive saving role of Jesus Christ, of whom the Bible says,

... there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

This was the message of the early church. It was as unwelcomed then as it is now – and it will be the death sentence of anyone who believes it during the Tribulation period.

Before we look at how the antichrist operates in his one-world religion, I believe it is absolutely necessary for the church to be warned in this dispensation that what John wrote about exists even now – the spirit of antichrist.

The Spirit of Antichrist – The Fifth Column

The New Testament clearly identifies the fifth column inside the walls of the church, so to speak, with two predominant characteristics.

1. First, the fifth column inside the church deny whatever truths of scripture they do not want.
2. Secondly, they practice whatever behavior they do want.

The apostate church, as John has already revealed to us in Revelation 2 and 3, is the church that twists the truth to accommodate sinful behavior. Several churches among the seven who received letters were involved in open immorality that the church was either ignoring or accepting.

So the church today could be categorized as apostate – or nearly there – by observing the lack of distinction among professing believers. Sin is condoned, and the church is not disturbed.

One of our Shepherds Seminary graduates told me some time ago as he arrived at his new church where he had been called to pastor, that he got a phone call on the Friday night before he was to preach his first sermon at his first church. The phone call was from a man outside the church who was attempting to reconcile with his wife who attended the church. This man wanted the pastor to read a letter he was composing to his estranged wife, and therefore wanted to meet with the pastor. Our young seminary graduate was very excited. He told me, “Imagine, on my first weekend, I get to be involved in the reconciliation of a marriage.”

When this young pastor met with the man later that night and read the letter, however, everything changed. He realized as he read the letter that this man was pleading in vain. Evidently, the man’s wife was not very interested in reconciling because she was living with another man who was actually attending the same church.

And, evidently, everyone in the church knew about this. The young pastor found out that the man with whom this woman was involved was actually a leader in the church. In fact, the pastor discovered that this man was the chairman of the Pastoral Search Committee that had just extended the call to him. And this was his first weekend in this church.

In every mainline denomination now, the facts are in and are well known – abortion is as commonplace inside the church as outside, fornication is as expected between single adults inside the church as outside, pornography is as rampant inside as outside, divorce as commonplace, greed as rampant and gossip as unbridled, homosexual behavior is condoned and even encouraged, and adulterers move unrepentantly and unchallenged among the assembly. They profess to know God but their deeds deny Him.

Add to apostate behavior, apostate belief.

The church at large today is throwing overboard historic, biblical doctrine that is now considered intolerant and out of date. Doctrine is not overtly denied as much as it is discreetly distorted – as Paul warned – twisted and redefined.

No apostate inside the assembly gets up and announces that he is denying Jesus Christ from here on out, but he will deny that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, that the resurrection has to be literal, that the Bible has to be infallible, that hell has to be a real place. The apostate will not deny that Christ exists, but he will deny that Christ is exclusively God.

The emergent church movement, which is popular in a number of circles today, is just another apostate

movement of church leaders who deny, among other historic doctrines, the necessity of faith in Christ alone for salvation.

Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest whose writings helped form the foundation of this emergent movement, put his belief in deceptive terms when he wrote, “I personally believe that while Jesus came to open the door to God’s house, all human beings can walk through that door, whether they know about Jesus or not. Today I see it as my call to help every person claim his or her own way to God.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This doctrine is now fully accepted by the average American “Christian,” and it is entrenched in every mainstream Protestant denomination as well.

Brian McLaren, listed as one of *Time Magazine’s* “25 Most Influential Evangelicals” in America, recently wrote this twisted statement in his book, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (code for, everybody gets into heaven), “I don’t believe making disciples equals making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and remain within their Buddhist or Hindu . . . contexts.”^{iv}

In other words, Christians can remain Hindus and Buddhists.

By the way, this is the same distorted reasoning popularized by “people of faith” that we have been hearing about all our lives – and every generation has its spokesmen.

Mother Theresa, who died a few years ago, was admired – and rightly so – for her clinics that provided safe, clean medical aid to the terminally sick and dying. I happened to visit her clinic in Calcutta. However, her theology was a different matter and I never cease to be amazed to hear some evangelical leader quote her as if she were a true believer. In one interview she said, “If in coming face to face with God we accept Him in our lives, then we become a better Hindu, a better Muslim, a better Catholic, a better whatever we are. What God is in your mind, you must accept.”^v

How empty of hope is this?

I do not want the god of my mind – I want the God of the word. I do not need a god I have invented – I want the God who was revealed in Holy Scripture that we, by the way, could never invent and still cannot begin to comprehend.

This one historic doctrine of saving faith in Christ alone is ever twisted by pseudo-spiritual leaders who say, as one leader did recently with clever deception that can almost go unnoticed by an unsuspecting

church, “Although I believe in Jesus as my personal Savior, I am not a Christian for that reason; I am a Christian because I believe that Jesus is the Savior of the whole world.”^{vi}

Jesus Christ had a different message, did He not? And it really was not all that popular, was it? This was because it was not at all inclusive. In fact, He said on one occasion that most people are not heading toward heaven, but toward hell, when He said,

. . . broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. (Matthew 7:13)

In other words, everyone does not get to God – even if a teacher named McLaren writes it in a book published by Zondervan that anyone can buy at their local Christian bookstore.

A woman in our church recently sent an email to me. She and her husband have been attending our church for a few months now. She said they left another Baptist church in our county, although she did not tell me the name of it, and talked about what led them away. In her Bible study group, a discussion had taken place on the subject of pluralism – that many paths lead to God. Islam, Hinduism, whatever, she wrote, was accepted. She said she spoke up and quoted John 14:6, where Jesus Christ said, He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him. Only one other lady in the Bible study agreed with her. On a later Sunday, she approached her Sunday school teacher to ask about this pluralistic belief. Evidently he believed it too. In fact, the teacher told her that John 14:6 had many interpretations and that she needed to talk to a Hebrew scholar to understand that it does not actually exclude Islam or Hinduism.

I found it interesting that this teacher would send her to a Hebrew scholar since this verse is not written in Hebrew – a minor point, I am sure.

This woman’s teacher went on to tell her that John was the only place in the Bible that stated Jesus was the only path to God.

She wrote, “It seemed that many key leaders in our church quietly supported this view of many paths to God.”

Well, to you and any others from churches that deny the singular effect of the Christ’s atonement to forgive sinners and save them for eternity, I say, “Welcome here – we believe it’s the truth.”

I need to finish this introduction! Actually, this is heavy on my heart. I wanted to get through the entire paragraph in Revelation 13 that introduces us to this

coming one-world religion, but the more I studied this deception and all the scripture involved in warning the church, the more it was clear that I needed to slow down.

Beloved, the closer to the end of the church age we come, the more resistant our world will be to the exclusive claim of Christ to make ready the introduction of the antichrist, who will, in a matter of thirty-six months, have the world worshipping him alone.

The refusal of the world to worship Christ alone will soon be replaced by a world who will eagerly worship the antichrist alone.

So to every generation, Paul warns the church of the coming plethora of false teachers who will attempt to deceive the flock of God.

To the church in Corinth he writes,

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

(II Corinthians 11:13-15)

How is it so easy to deceive people? How can these guys get away with this without a lot of people waking up to it?

For one thing, Satan knows the human heart was created to worship, and it will worship something or someone.

Everyone has faith in something. Everyone believes in something. Even those who say they do not believe in anything have faith that there is nothing in which to believe.

Well, get ready – the day is approaching when the human race will be deceived by a religious leader who will turn the heart of the world to worship the antichrist.

The Anti-Spirit's Partnership

Now, notice verse 11 of Revelation 13. The first few words are John's way of introducing a new vision.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth . . .

Note that the first beast – the antichrist – came up out of the sea, as we were told in verse 1 of this same

chapter. More than likely this represents the Mediterranean Sea, since the antichrist will rise from the revived Roman Empire that surrounds this sea.^{vii}

This second beast, called the false prophet in Revelation chapter 19, arises from the earth. The word is translated "land" in Matthew 2:6, where we read of the "land of Judah"; also in verse 20 of this same chapter, we read about the "land of Israel," using the same word.

For this reason, in fact, there are many who believe that the false prophet will be Jewish.

You might say, "There's no way a Jewish man would ever promote a one-world worship system and try to get along with Muslims and Christians."

I have in my study a copy of an interview that took place last month with the Chief Rabbi in Israel who said, "My dream is to create a United Religious Nations."

This rabbi went on to explain that since Abraham is the father of all three monotheistic religions that are embraced by the majority of the world's population – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – this connection should begin a dialogue of peace.

You are probably thinking, "There's no way the Muslim world would ever follow a Jewish religious leader."

I just happened to read in this month's edition of a journal to which I subscribe, an article which revealed that the King of Saudi Arabia, a devout Muslim representing the most religiously intolerant country on the planet, had convened a conference in Spain.

This conference in Madrid has been termed "historic". For one thing it was a conference on religious inclusivism, attended by evangelical leaders – and I use the term "evangelical" loosely, liberal lobbyists from all kinds of denominations, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Zoroastrians (these are not people who believe in Zorro!).

Zoroastrians are monotheists who believe in an uncreated god named Mazda. And yes, the sporty car bears his name with the exact spelling – Mazda, the god of the Zoroastrians. So those of you who drive Mazda's – you are in deep trouble – just thought you would like to know.

Three hundred religious leaders convened in Spain where this Muslim King shocked everyone by his open embrace of other religions when he said, "We all believe in one God, who sent messengers for the good of humanity in this world and the hereafter." In other words, we ought to find common ground in

our monotheism and in the name of unity in religion, get along.^{viii}

John records in this verse, the rise of a powerful, demonically-inspired man who will rise to a place of pseudo-spiritual leadership.

Notice John's vision further, in Revelation 13:11b.

. . . and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

More than likely this image of a lamb is not as much his counterfeiting of Christ, the Lamb – we know the antichrist will try to pull this off – as language that takes the reader back to Christ's words in Matthew 7:15. This is where He describes false religious teachers as men dressed as harmless sheep, but who are really hungry wolves who will tear the sheep apart.

This is part of the false prophet's deception. No one is afraid of a little lamb. Lambs do not scare people. They are gentle, harmless, innocent, and, throughout scripture, ceremonially clean.^{ix}

He is going to be the perfect gentleman.

However, John adds to this description at the end of verse 11,

. . . he spoke as a dragon.

This ties the false prophet to the language of Satan, who is called the dragon in this exposé.

How does the dragon speak?

***. . . he is a liar and the father of lies.
John 8:44***

John also said of Satan in this text,

. . . Whenever he speaks a lie, he is speaking [his native tongue]. . .

The false prophet is in league with the enemy. He is actually partnered with Satan. He will work like no fifth column ever worked behind the scenes, ultimately aiding the one who will destroy the billions of people who have surrendered to this false messiah.

False prophets are all like this. They often appear meek and mild and harmless. They offer hope and solutions to the problems troubling men and women. Yet they are the voices of hell and when they open their mouths, Satan speaks. This false prophet will come like a lamb, speaking false, deceptive words of comfort. He will promise the suffering, tormented people of the world that all will be well.^x

F. F. Bruce called him the "Minister of Propaganda".^{xi}

In reality, this false prophet is in partnership with the devil himself.

I want you to underscore not only his partnership, but his primary objective.

The Anti-Spirit's Passion

Look at Revelation 13, verse 12.

He exercises all the authority of the first beast [that is, the antichrist] in his presence...

There are some who believe the false prophet is the antichrist. The text clearly indicates he is exercising the authority of the antichrist in the very presence of the antichrist.

Others believe that the false prophet is not really a person, but an institution . . . a religious ideology. The trouble with this is that institutions and ideologies will not be thrown into hell, only people who are ultimately judged by God.^{xii}

Revelation 19:20 reveals with terrifying finality that the beast is . . .

. . . seized, and with him the false prophet who performed signs in his presence . . . these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.

However, for a short amount of time, the false prophet will act with great passion to accomplish what? Look at verse 12 again.

. . . And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

Simply put, his passion is to bring about a one-world religion that raises the voice of humanity to praise and glorify the false messiah. He literally will function as one who seeks to glorify the antichrist.

Just as Satan will seek to counterfeit God the Father, the antichrist will attempt to counterfeit God the Son and the false prophet will attempt to counterfeit the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at contrasting descriptions we are given in the Bible:^{xiii}

| Holy Spirit | Anti-spirit (False Prophet) |
|--|---|
| exalts Christ (John 15:26) | will exalt the antichrist |
| reveals divine revelation (John 16:13) | will be an instrument of satanic revelation |
| seals believers to God forever (I John 3:24) | will seal unbelievers with the number of the antichrist |
| builds up the body of Christ (John 7:37-39) | will build up the followers of antichrist |
| enlightens mankind with God's truth (John 14:17) | will deceive mankind with Satan's lie |

We can easily see nothing less than a counterfeit trinity.

1. The first person – Satan – anti-God who is the father of this plan and scheme;
2. The second person – Satan's "son of perdition" – the antichrist – a human being empowered by him to perform his bidding;
3. The third person – anti-spirit – the one who exalts the "son of perdition" and seals his followers forever.^{xiv}

This is the *anti-trinity* – the counterfeit trinity from the kingdom of darkness, coming to deceive the world from following the true and living God and those heading for the kingdom of heaven.

And the anti-trinity is going to sound a lot like the deceivers from whom I quoted earlier in our study today.

Rob Bell, another supposed emergent leader in the church, was interviewed in a supposed evangelical magazine. In this interview, Bell said, "The church has . . . preached horrible messages about being left behind and that this place is going to burn – [these are] absolutely toxic messages that are against the teaching of scripture, which state that we are connected to God, we are connected to the earth, we are connected to each other. Your relationship with God is tied into your relationship with the soil . . . [then he says] go back to Genesis."^{xv}

So I did! In Genesis we discover the original sin and mankind's spiritual death through disobedience – no longer connected to God. However, we see God's initiative in taking the lives of innocent animals and clothing Adam and Eve in their skins – a picture of sacrificial atonement that will be culminated in the final sacrifice, promised to Adam and Eve, the seed

of the woman, the suffering Messiah who will crush the serpent's head in final victory.

This is what we find in Genesis.

In Genesis we watch the world judged through a flood, and those left out of the ark are destroyed. This sounds a lot like being left behind and like this place is going to be judged, to me!

When we go back to Genesis, we have Satan, sin, atonement, grace, a promise, and a coming Messiah.

Your relationship to God today, my friend, if you have one, is not tied to the soil – your relationship to God is tied to a Savior. And anyone who tells you otherwise is a false teacher who speaks the dragon's language of lies.

However, in our faith – the faith of the redeemed who have been rescued from the god of this world – we say with the apostles,

Our faith has found a resting place,

Not in device or creed;

We trust the ever living One,

His wounds for us shall plead.

We need no other argument,

We need no other plea,

It is enough that Jesus died,

And that He died for me.

The fifth column, unbelievers within the church, will promote unity at the expense of truth. But, the religious unity for which the world clamors is trivial, superficial, self-centered, and ultimately, flawed and temporary.

However, an assembly committed to the truth revealed in the scriptures can enjoy true unity of heart and purpose – not only in the assembly, but between assemblies.

Conclusion

I want to close with an illustration of gracious unity, based on our confession of true, biblical faith.

I received this week, a gracious letter from Pastor Gregory and the Alliance Church here in town. Many of you know we worked together at the recent memorial service for the former North Carolina State University women's basketball coach Kay Yow. Our two churches combined choirs and some 350 volunteers. We wanted to see the gospel of Christ take root in the hearts of thousands of people who would hear Kay's testimony. As an addendum, our church communications department, who put together a beautiful one-page tribute that had Kay's

testimony on one side, has received a request to allow NC State to print 10,000 copies to distribute. Our communications ministry leader, Paul Franitza wisely said, “Yes, but only if you print both sides and include Kay’s testimony.” They agreed.

Pastor Gregory wrote to me and then included a letter to our church. I believe it will not only encourage you, but serve as an illustration of unity, not at the expense of truth, but that exalts the truth of Christ. He writes,

I have reflected a bit on what enabled our congregations to minister together so well. I’ve tried to crystallize my thoughts and here’s what I’ve come up with so far.

First, we share a common belief in the trustworthiness, authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture. We are persuaded we are called to strive to live by every word our God speaks. We prayerfully depend on Christ to sanctify us by His truth. Thank you for loving the word of God and the God of the word as you ministered to us and alongside us.

Second, we share a common conviction that the gospel is powerful to save. The gospel we love and herald is not a ragbag full of human speculations and hearsay hopes. It is of divine origin. God alone planned, promised and provided the gospel – the only saving message in existence. Thank you for your faithfulness to the good news that forgiveness and eternal hope are ours only through Christ our Redeemer and Lord.

Third, we share a common devotion to the fellowship of believers. How sweet is the taste of the communion of the saints. Our choir and congregation have not stopped talking about the kindness, generosity and glad-hearted serving spirit of the saints at Colonial. Thank you for your overflowing love for the people of Christ.

Finally, we share the conviction that our supreme purpose is to glorify God. It was a joy to serve the cause of God’s glory with you.

With much gratitude,

Pastor Mitchell Gregory

Cary Alliance Church

Cary, North Carolina

This, dear friends, is the basis of true, joyful, religious harmony, which is based on the objective revealed truth of scripture, is built up in Christ our

Lord, and pursues the declaration of the gospel of Christ and the glory of God.

ⁱ George Sweeting, “Betrayal in the Church,” Moody Monthly (April 1992), quoted by Mark Hitchcock in Seven Signs of the End Times (Multnomah, 2002), p. 81.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 82.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henri Nouwen, Sabbatical Journey (Crossroad Publishing, 2000), p. 51.

^{iv} Brian McLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy (Zondervan, 2006), p. 260.

^v John MacArthur, “The Coming World Peace,” <http://www.gty.org/resources/transcripts/66-23>.

^{vi} McLaren, p. 100.

^{vii} Adrian Rogers, Unveiling the End Times In Our Time (Broadman, 2004), p. 159.

^{viii} “Security On the Island of Grace,” Friends of Israel Magazine (Jan./Feb. 2009), p. 8.

^{ix} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 170.

^x John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 59.

^{xi} F. F. Bruce, quoted in Stewart Custer, Revelation: From Patmos to Paradise (BJU Press, 2004), p. 151.

^{xii} MacArthur, Revelation, p. 58.

^{xiii} Edward Hindson, Revelation: Unlocking the Future (AMG Publishers, 2002), p. 142.

^{xiv} Donald Grey Barnhouse, Revelation: God’s Last Word (Zondervan, 1971), p. 241.

^{xv} “Rob Bell Tells It Like It Is,” Relevant Magazine (Jan./Feb. 2008).