

Is Ben Shapiro an Antichrist According to 1 John?

For many Christians, the Bible is crystal-clear on the subject: Anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ (meaning, the Messiah) is a liar and an antichrist (see 1 John 2:22). After all, these Christians reason, if you are not for Christ you are against Christ, and that makes you literally “anti-Christ.” As Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Matt. 12:30, NIV). Based on that logic, Jewish leaders like Ben Shapiro and Dennis Prager, despite their conservative values and despite working side by side with Christians, are both antichrists. Is this true?

On the one hand, it is undeniable that the New Testament divides human beings into the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness (see Col. 1:13, 1 John 5:19). And it is absolutely true that the New Testament declares that salvation for every human being, both Gentile and Jew, comes through Jesus the Messiah alone (see John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Outside of Him, the New Testament teaches, we are lost.

In that sense, we can agree that, spiritually speaking, those who are not for Jesus are against Him. But are they the ones John is describing as “antichrists” in 1 John 2:22, and should we refer to Shapiro and Prager as “antichrists,” as some Christians have done? Not at all.

In 1 John, the author is dealing with heretical pseudo-believers who were once part of the local Christian assemblies but who have now departed. He writes:

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have

come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (1 John 2:18–19, author's emphasis).

Notice, “they” were once part of our communities, but now “they” have left. These are the “antichrists” of whom John speaks. How do we recognize people like this?

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John continues, “Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 John 2:22–23).

Then, so that there can be no ambiguity at all, he explains, “*I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray*” (1 John 2:26, author's emphasis) As New Testament scholar Stephen Smalley writes (with reference to 1 John 2:22), “For the first time in 1 John the content of the heretics' Christological error is specified.”

John is dealing with heretical Christians, not Jews who don't believe in Jesus or idol worshippers or, by implication, Muslims or Buddhists. This is an in-house dispute. That's why John calls such people “liars.” They have been presented with the truth about Jesus and claim to be orthodox in their Christian faith, yet they are lying.

This hardly applies to Jewish men like Shapiro or Prager, who strongly encourage Christians to practice their faith rather than telling them they shouldn't believe that Jesus is the Christ.

According to Smalley (and I'll simplify his language), John was either speaking of a former pagan who now professed faith in Jesus, but in a heretical way, or a professing Jewish Christian who held to a heretical view of Jesus. But John was *not* addressing Jews who did not believe in Jesus at all, since they had a different expectation of who the Messiah would be.

This makes perfect sense. After all, let's say that you were an ultra-Orthodox Jew raised in a tight-knit religious community in Jerusalem. You have never read the New Testament or interacted with a true Christian, and the only "Jesus" you know is the Jesus of church history. In your mind, there is a straight line from the New Testament to the Crusades and from the antisemitic writings of Luther to the horrors of the Holocaust, an event that took place in the heart of "Christian" Europe.

The "Christianity" you heard about from previous generations is the religion of the pogroms, when enraged "Christians" wreaked havoc on Jewish communities after celebrating Easter, eager to pay back the "Christ killers." (For more on this bloody history, see my book "Our Hands Are Stained with Blood.")

You might also associate Christianity with church buildings filled with statues of Jesus and the saints, which is absolutely abhorrent to you, an explicit violation of the first of the Ten Commandments. This, in your eyes, is rank idolatry.

For your part, you spend hours every day in study and prayer, wanting to express your love for God by remaining loyal to Him and keeping His commandments, willing to die for Him rather than convert for a false, idolatrous religion.

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That is hardly the person John is speaking about, since that person is not “lying” by denying that Jesus is the Christ. Rather, as Paul wrote about himself before coming to faith, they are acting in ignorance and unbelief (see 1 Tim. 1:13). But they are not “lying.”

That’s why I describe such people as being “so near and yet so far” in terms of their faith (there’s a whole chapter devoted to the subject in “Our Hands Are Stained with Blood”). And that’s why I pray so fervently for their eyes to be open to the real Jesus-Yeshua, our only Messiah and King, as I am convinced by Scripture that they are lost without Him.

But to say, as a recent debater did, that Jews practice an antichrist religion and are guilty of “blasphemy” because they don’t believe in the hypostatic union of Christ is the height of theological arrogance. It is the very thing Paul warned about in Romans 11:17-25 in a related, though different context. Quoting 1 John in support of such views, it is an abuse of the Word of God.

Does Ben Shapiro need Jesus-Yeshua? Absolutely, and that will continue to be my prayer for him. May God open his eyes to see and give him the courage to follow! But is he an antichrist according to 1 John 2:22? Not at all.

(After writing this article, I noticed that Andrew Torba, the CEO of Gab and often accused of antisemitism, replied to my post asking if, according to the New Testament, Ben Shapiro was an antichrist. He replied, “Yes, and it isn’t up for debate or discussion.” Not surprisingly, he did not reply to my offer to debate him on this or simply to come on my “Line of Fire” show and state his position.)

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Dr. Michael Brown () is the host of the nationally syndicated The Line of Fire radio show. He is the author of over 40

books, including “Can You be Gay and Christian?”; “Our Hands are Stained with Blood”; and “Seizing the Moment: How to Fuel the Fires of Revival.” You can connect with him on Facebook, X or YouTube.