

1 John
It Matters What You Believe
1 John 2:18-27
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Well, let's turn together to 1 John, chapter 2. With the medical advances of the last century, it became increasingly difficult for the medical community to say exactly when a person no longer had life residing within him, physical life, and when they had actually died. To help states define when death officially occurs, a President's Commission was put in place to study the issue. The result of that was what's called "The Uniform Declaration of Death Act." It was drafted in 1981, approved by the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association, and it gave two definitions for when a person can legally be declared dead.

The first is obvious and the one that's been in place throughout history is irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions. In other words, when your heart irreversibly stops beating and when your breath irreversibly stops as well. But in today's world, that was not enough because we have means to keep those things going, to keep you breathing artificially, to keep your heart pumping, and so a second definition was added. And that is irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brainstem. Using those two tests, now the medical community can assess whether or not a person is physically alive or physically dead.

What we're learning in 1 John is that there are equally helpful tests to show whether a person is spiritually alive or dead. You can know, based on what's revealed in this first letter John wrote, whether you have spiritual life pumping through your veins as it were, or whether you are still dead in your trespasses and sins. This book helps us understand; in fact, that's the theme of 1

John, it's the tests of eternal life. Do you have eternal life in you? John gives three tests and each of those tests is repeated three times in three cycles or three movements.

After the prologue in the first four verses, you have the first cycle; this is where we find ourselves. It begins in chapter 1, verse 5, runs through chapter 2, verse 27. We've already considered the moral test and that is obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word. And we've looked at the social test, love for God and for His people. Today we come to the third test in this first cycle or movement of the book of 1 John; it is the doctrinal test, faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. And by that, I mean, faith in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel. Let's read it together, 1 John, chapter 2, beginning in verse 18, and running down through verse 27:

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. 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. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. 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? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. This is the promise which He Himself made to us, eternal life. These things I have written to you

concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

This paragraph, this passage teaches us that a true Christian knows, believes, and perseveres in the biblically orthodox teaching about Jesus and His gospel. In other words, the true Christian understands who the biblical Jesus is, what the biblical gospel is, and has embraced it and continues to embrace it; this is the doctrinal test. Now, he unfolds this basic test in several signs, we could say. John here identifies for us the vital signs of whether or not there's life to show if someone passes the doctrinal test; and, by passing it, proves, in fact, to be spiritually alive, to be a true Christian.

So, let's look at the vital signs that reveal whether or not you pass this doctrinal test. Well, the first vital sign connected to this doctrinal test is this, and it's the only one we'll look at today, “Do You Belong to a Biblical Church,” do you belong to a biblical church, verses 18 and 19? Now, the key point of these two verses is this, “A true Christian doesn't abandon a biblically Orthodox church for a false church,” a true Christian doesn't abandon a biblically Orthodox church for a false church.

Now, let me begin by defining those terms, what I mean by a true church versus a false church. I'm just **going to** give you a summary today because, as this passage unfolds, John is **going to** drill down a lot more and define this more for us. But let me give you an overview. A true

church holds and teaches a biblical view of all things necessary for salvation. Let me say that again, a true church holds and teaches a biblical view of all things necessary for salvation. Primarily then, we're talking about the fact that it holds a biblical view of God, a biblical view of Jesus Christ's person, a biblical view of the work of Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection, and a biblical view of the gospel--how a person appropriates the work of Christ, how someone comes to have a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, a false church does not hold and teach a biblical view of all things necessary for salvation. So, that's an overview, that's a summary of what I mean; I'm going to use those expressions throughout my message. Now, you know what I mean; 'true church,' all things necessary for salvation are taught and believed; 'false church,' not all things necessary for salvation are taught and believed. They're off on something either regarding God, Jesus Christ, or the gospel.

So, with that in mind, let's talk about what was happening in the first century and prompted this section. In the first century, then the churches that John wrote to, teachers had arisen within the church. They were teaching false doctrine, and they made disciples who became committed to this new, terribly flawed teaching.

Now, these false teachers stayed connected to the true churches that John knew and loved for a period of time. Why? Because they hoped to persuade others to embrace their false teaching. But when the false teachers finally realized that they were not going to convince the rest of the church, they were not going to convince the elders, they were not going to convince the other

members of their views, they then left to form their own false churches. The same thing happens today. By God's goodness, we haven't seen false teachers arise in this church and lead people off to another setting. But we have seen members of this church who have left this church and embraced false doctrine and false churches. And unfortunately, across our country today, there are plenty of occasions where this is happening.

So, what are we to think? How are we to process it when professing believers abandon a true church and connect with a false church? Well, John helps us understand it here. He begins with, "A Theological Explanation," a theological explanation of why there are these defections that happen in the Christian church.

Now this is verse 18; there are many ways that John could have explained the reasons that people abandon or defect from a biblical church. He could have gone, for example, to the parable of the soils and explained how, at a personal level, maybe the cares of this life choke a person's budding faith, or perhaps persecution, and so forth, the things Christ described there. But John didn't choose to go there. Instead, he chose to explain these events in their larger theological context; we could even say, eschatological context, that is having to do with the end times.

Let's look at it together, verse 18, "Children," this favorite term of endearment from John marks the beginning of a new paragraph, and it reminds us at the same time, that this paragraph is not addressed to false believers. Instead, it's addressed to true Christians. He's trying to encourage those who remain, not those who went out, but those who remain. John goes on to explain why

those first century defections in the churches that he loved and ministered to, why those defections happened and why they still happen today.

First of all, he says, theologically, it's because it reflects, "God's Redemptive Plan." Where we are in God's redemptive plan, look at verse 18. "Children, it is the last hour," the last hour.

That's the only time, by the way in Scripture, that that expression is used, the last hour.

However, there are other similar expressions used that help us understand it. In the Old Testament, the expression, "the last days," is used of end-time events such as 'The Tribulation,' in Ezekiel 38, and of the 'Millennium' in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

When you come to the New Testament, Jesus uses "the last day," singular, to refer to 'The Resurrection' in John 6, and to 'The Great White Throne' Judgment in John 12. Peter uses the expression, "last days," to refer to the events at Pentecost. In his message there, he quotes Joel and says, "It was promised that in these 'last days,' the Spirit would come, and this would happen." And so, he connects the 'last days' with what happened at Pentecost. And in 2 Timothy 3:1, Paul connects the "last days" to the entirety of the church age in which imposters and evil men will come, and hard, difficult times will prevail. So, it's an inclusive term.

Here's the key question, though. When did the last days begin? That's an easy question to answer. It began with the incarnation of Jesus Christ; there are two passages that make that clear. Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 2, the writer of Hebrews, writing decades after Christ, said, "in these last days, (God) has spoken to us in His Son," meaning in the incarnation. In 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 20, again, speaking of Christ, "...He was foreknown before the foundation of

the world, but has appeared in these last times for **the sake of** you.” So then, when we take all of that together and we come back to our expression here, the last hour, John is using it, and there's a consensus of this, he is using it primarily here to refer to the time between the first coming, and the second coming.

It can reach beyond that into other end-time events, but primarily, the time between His first and second coming. John wrote in the first century, and said, “It is the last hour.” You see, Christians understood even then that they were living in the ‘last days.’ To use the words of chapter 2, verse 8, the darkness was already “passing away,” and verse 17-18, the the age to come was dawning. Romans 13:11, “...knowing the time, (Paul writes.) that it is already the hour for you to awaken for from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.” It's the ‘last hour,’ Paul says, “Wake up!” 1 Peter, 4:7, “The end of all things is near.”

So, we are living in a time in the redemptive plan of God that can be called the ‘last hour.’ Why? Because there's nothing else to happen before our Lord returns; these are the ‘last days.’ Whether these are the end of the last days, I can't tell you, but they're certainly the last days. They were from the time Christ came into the world. We can expect false Christians to defect from the true church because it is the last hour in God's redemptive program, and that last hour focuses on His Son. Because of Satan's opposition to God's Son, it's really not surprising to us that, in this last hour, Satan would desperately try to damage the Church of Jesus Christ. So, His opposition has ramped up.

So, the defections that occur not only can be explained by where we are on God's redemptive timeline, we're in the last hour, but also because it reflects "Satan's Destructive Plan." You see, while God is carrying out the timeline of redemption, and working all things out according to His will, Satan is desperately working his own destructive plan. The defections happening in the church today, as people who have professed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord abandon true churches, it is part of Satan's plan. John reminds us that Satan's plan has its ultimate goal in the future. Verse 18 tells us "The antichrist is coming," The antichrist is coming. Notice how he puts it, verse 18, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming." Now, the only time that this word 'antichrist' occurs in Scripture is in John's letters. It's the first time, in fact, that this word is used in Greek literature. John, under the inspiration of the Spirit, invented it, putting two words together, '*anti*' and '*Christos*' or Messiah, the anti-Messiah.

Now, the word means then 'against,' or 'opposed' to Christ. At times, it can also mean 'instead of Christ,' that is, not only someone who's opposed to Christ, but someone who presents himself as the counterfeit Christ, the counterfeit Messiah. Christ warned that that would happen in the Olivet Discourse.

So, by using this term 'antichrist' here, John intends, primarily, to speak of those opposed to Christ, and sometimes those opposed to Christ also offer themselves as counterfeit Christs. Now, clearly here in verse 18, the first reference, the singular antichrist, refers to a future individual, 'The' antichrist, whom Scripture tells us will appear during the future Seven Year Tribulation. That antichrist, 'The' antichrist, will oppose and counterfeit the real Christ.

Turn back to 2 Thessalonians, there's a long section here, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, beginning in verse 1, down through verse 12, where Paul discusses the person and career of the antichrist that's coming. And look at how he describes him in verse 3; 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 3, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it* (~~The last~~ *the day of the Lord.*) *will not come* unless the apostasy comes first (And notice this.), and the man of lawlessness is revealed..." That's just another name for the antichrist. He is "the son of destruction." And notice his career, verse 4, he "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." So, the antichrist will both oppose the true God and the true Christ, and He will offer himself as a substitute, someone to be worshipped instead. As one author puts it, "The antichrist is a usurper who, under false pretenses, assumes a position which does not belong to him and who opposes the rightful owner. The idea of opposition is predominant."

Now, go back to our text in 1 John, and notice John says, "...you heard that antichrist is coming." First of all, "is coming," the way he says that in the original underscores that this coming is as sure as if it was already happening. He doesn't say, "will come," he says, "is coming." It's just a way to say, "This is really *going to* happen; it's almost as certain as if it were happening right now."

But where did John's hearers, his readers, hear about this future antichrist? Well, they certainly heard about it from John because John's letters are the only place in Scripture, as I said, where the word 'antichrist' appears. It occurs here in verse 18; go down to verse 22, it's used again there, not of 'The' antichrist, but of someone with the spirit of antichrist, verse 22.

Go over to chapter 4, verse 3, "...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." And then the last time he uses it is in 2 John, verse 7, "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." So, in several of those passages, he doesn't use it of the one who's coming in the future, but of those who are here now, and we're **going to** come back to that in a moment.

But he uses this word 'antichrist,' and clearly in our text, verse 18, he uses it of that one individual who is yet to come. This person, although he's not called antichrist outside of John's writings, he is clearly described in a number of places. You can study on your own; you can find him in the Old Testament in Daniel 7; Daniel 8; Daniel 11; he's even mentioned, his career as mentioned in Daniel 12. Christ mentions him in The Olivet Discourse. Just before His death, He talks about the fact that there's coming a time before His Second Coming, when, He uses Daniel's phrase, "the abomination of desolation will take place." When this person, the future antichrist, will set up an image of himself in the temple in Jerusalem, and demand that he be worshipped.

Paul refers to him in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. And as we study Revelation, we will meet him a number of times. We first meet him in Revelation 11:7, but when you get to Revelation 13, we will see his career unfolded, and then we see his end coming in Revelation 19 and in Revelation 20.

So, Satan has a plan for the ‘last hour.’ And his plan culminates with the appearance of ‘The’ antichrist. But Satan has already begun to work toward that goal, and so back to verse 18, “many antichrists **have appeared** (are already here).” The Antichrist is coming, but many antichrists are already here. Notice verse 18, “...just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared.” Have appeared means they've already arrived; when John was writing, they were already on the scene, and were influencing the church.

Now, Jesus had prophesied that in the time between His First and Second Coming, false prophets and false messiahs would arise. Matthew 24, verses 4 and 5. Why? Why would the time from His First Coming to His Second Coming, be so riddled with false Messiahs and false prophets trying to mislead God's people? I think there's a great answer to that and Burdick's Commentary. Listen to what he writes:

Prior to the Incarnation, Satan's rule as prince of this world was not seriously threatened. But now the time period has dawned during which he will be defeated once for all. Foreseeing this, the devil puts forth great effort to prevent his downfall. This furious activity is expressed in the many antichrists or false teachers who attack the truth of God, and the people of God. Satan knows his days are numbered, and he is relentlessly trying to damage the Church of Jesus Christ in the meantime.

Now, back to 1 John 2, who exactly is John referring to when he mentions these ‘many antichrists?’ He's referring to the false teachers who were attacking the churches of his time. Go to chapter 4, verse 1, he comes to this test, this doctrinal test another time, and notice how he

puts it here. 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Now, notice the “many antichrists;” so, chapter 2, verse 18, have now become “the many false prophets” of chapter 4, verse 1.

Look down at verse 3, “...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.” So, while ‘The’ antichrist is not on the scene, the spirit that will drive the antichrist is already here, and motivating others. Like the future antichrist, the antichrists of John's day and ours, are opposed to Christ and inspired by Satan. That's why Paul in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2:7 says, “...the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” The man of sin isn't here, but what he's **going to** stand for is already very much alive and well.

So, understand then, that in John's day, there were many antichrists. And let me tell you something, brothers and sisters, it is still true today. Beware, there are many antichrists still alive and well in our world. You say, “How do I recognize them? Who are antichrists? Who are these people? Let me give you two biblical categories. This is how you recognize the antichrists of our time. Category number one, purveyors of false religion that **are** opposed to Christ, just like the future antichrist will be. I mean, think about it, what is the antichrist going to do? He's not **going to** buddy up to the Christian faith; he's going to set himself up as a false object of worship in replacement of the true God and the true Christ. So, false religion, the purveyors of false religion, who oppose Christ, they are the many antichrists in our world.

But there's a second category that's even more difficult and more troubling, and that is antichrist, the many antichrists in our day are false teachers attached to the Christian faith who claim to support Jesus but are actually opposed to the biblical Jesus. This is just like the antichrists in John's day. Remember who they were; the antichrists John is talking about are those who grew up from within the Christian church, who said, "We love Jesus!" They just redefined who He was. They said, "Oh, yeah, we believe He died." They just redefined the gospel. So, false teachers attached to the Christian faith who claim to support Jesus Christ but are actually opposed to the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel, they are the antichrists of our day—mark them. Paul warned us this would be true. In Acts, chapter 20, verse 30, he said to the Ephesian elders, "...from among your own selves men will arise (meaning out of the church), speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Now, please listen to me carefully; this is crucial to understand. Many antichrists don't say they're against Christ; they don't wear antichrist across their forehead. No, they say they're for Christ, they love Christ, they just follow a different Christ, not the one who's defined in the Scripture.

Notice verse 18, "...even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour." The presence of false teachers and their false version of Jesus Christ led John to conclude that we were in the last hour, we were already there. Now, that is his theological explanation for the reason there are defections from a true Christian church. You know what he's really saying? Don't be surprised; it's part of God's redemptive plan, we're in the last days. Therefore, it's also part of Satan's current strategy to infiltrate the church and the world with as

many antichrists as he can. And the final culmination of his plan will be 'The' antichrist who will enter the world stage at some point in the future, maybe sooner than any of us can imagine.

Now, having given us that 'Theological Explanation,' John goes on in verse 19, to give us, 'A Practical Explanation' of the defections. He just explains what happens, really, on the ground in churches. Let's look at it together. Here's 'A Practical Explanation.' First of all, he says this, "False Christians often defect from true churches to false churches," false Christians often defect from true churches to false churches.

Now, let me remind you again what I mean by true and false Christians. A false Christian is just someone who says, "Yes, I'm a Christian; I'm a follower of Jesus Christ," but really isn't. And false Christians often defect from true biblical churches to associate with false churches. Now, before we look at this, verse 19, in detail, let me give you a couple of caveats. First of all, there are true Christians in false churches. Now, let me quickly add, that there are only true Christians in those false churches, if they haven't believed the false Jesus and the false gospel those churches teach. In God's goodness, sometimes those churches don't teach very well and there can be true believers who really have embraced a basic understanding of Christ and a basic Biblical understanding of the gospel and have believed. So, there are true Christians in false churches, but only if they don't believe in the false Jesus or the false gospel that church teaches.

Another caveat is that true Christians can be tempted by serious error. And I would add a third, true untaught Christians can even remain for a time in false churches, but as we'll discover, not forever. What we're learning here from this passage, is that true Christians don't abandon true

churches to join false churches. If you're a true believer, you don't leave the truth that you've been planted in and where your heart resonates with the truth; you don't leave that to join a false church if you're a true Christian, it doesn't happen. And John's **going to** go on to explain why.

But as we look at verse 19, John highlights several important truths about this defection of false Christians; look at them with me. First of all, he explains to us that their defection is inevitable if the true church they are a part of doesn't first embrace their faults doctrine. In other words, like these false teachers, they stay for a time in hopes that they can convince others and win others, but if that doesn't happen, they're not **going to** want to stay around very long. Why? Because what's being taught in that church is completely contradictory to what they claim and teach. It's uncomfortable. So, it's inevitable.

Look at verse 19, “They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us.” Now, there is a fascinating word-play in the Greek text here; let me read it to you literally from the text. “Out of us they went, but they were not out of us.” You see, he's using those expressions in different ways. The first ‘out of us’ has to do with their location; they had been in the local fellowship of believers, but they went out of that fellowship. By the way, the form of the Greek verb ‘went out’ implies that they left these churches by their own choice, not by church discipline. They decided to leave the Orthodox majority to associate solely with their own group; “They went out of us.”

The second use of ‘out of us’ describes not their location, but their character. They went out of us physically, but they were never out of us spiritually. They never belonged to us; they never

shared our spiritual life. They were outwardly in the fellowship of the church, but they were never really believers.

Now, don't misunderstand here. Some people misuse this text. You know, some true believers have a problem in a true church and disagree and maybe they don't handle it well, maybe they do. But they leave a true church to go to another true church. Some people will pull this text out and sort of beat them over the head with it. "They went out from us because they weren't of us." That's not what this text is teaching.

You'll notice in verse 19, the pronouns 'they' and 'us' both occur five times. And 'us' here that's used five times in verse 19, is the fellowship of all true believers. Remember, he's not writing about one church, but he's writing about a number of churches. So, 'us' is all true believers. So here you have people who abandon the fellowship of all true believers. Don't misunderstand, they didn't stop professing to be Christians. They continue to say, "Yes, I'm a Christian, I'm a follower of Jesus Christ," but they established themselves as a distinct group opposed to the Orthodox, biblical true church.

Now, in John's day, these were, and we'll look more at this, but these were pre-Gnostic teachers with a flawed view of Christ and a flawed view of the gospel. In our day, there is a long list of those who have abandoned true churches to create their own churches. There are numerous cults and heresies that have grown up within the Christian church and led people into false churches. Just a couple of examples. The Roman Catholic Church has replaced the biblical gospel with a works-based salvation, thereby becoming a false church and no longer a true

church. The Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, they worship a different God, not the Trinity of the Bible; they worship a different Jesus, not the Jesus who is fully God and fully man. They teach a different gospel, a different way for us to be right with God. Listen, don't listen to those even in pop Christianity who say that the Mormons and we worship the same Jesus. It's a different god. It's a different Jesus. It's a different gospel. Liberal Protestantism, the United Presbyterians, for example, the United Methodists, moderate Baptists, they have abandoned the biblical gospel and often even the biblical God. I can take you to a church here in the Metroplex, United Methodist Church, where there is an addendum to the hymn book in which there's a hymn to God, our mother. Many in the Church of Christ have made baptism part of the grounds of salvation; that's teaching another gospel and is under the condemnation of Galatian, chapter 1.

Now, all those groups and many others have defected from true churches to form their own group or, frankly, in some cases, the false so infiltrated and overwhelmed the true, that the true Christians were the ones who were forced to leave. But defections are inevitable if the true Church, those false teachers and their followers belong to, doesn't embrace their false doctrine.

Another point, in verse 19, is their defection shows they were never truly Christians at all. Notice what he says in verse 19, "They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for (because) if they had been of us, they would have remained with us." 'With us' there at the end, refers to the outward fellowship of the church. If they had been genuine believers, they would have remained connected to the outward fellowship of a true church.

Let me put this in the form of a truism. Make no mistake, true believers always persevere in the faith and in their association with other believers in a true biblical church. The New Testament knows nothing of individualistic Christians who just sort of wander through life on their own as an island. No! 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, when you were redeemed, you were immersed, “baptized into,” has nothing to do with water, you were immersed into the body of Christ; you're a part of the body of Christ, like it or not. And if you're a true Christian, you find yourself attracted to, and gravitating toward, and interested in, and wanting to serve alongside those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. The fact that these professing believers left the true churches John shepherded to belong to false churches proved they had never been Christians at all. F.F. Bruce writes, “Continuance is the test of reality.”

There's a third truth here about their defection, and this is a surprising one. Their defection is part of our Lord's plan. Look at verse 19 again, “They went out” so that it would be shown that they all are not “of us,” literally, “in order that it would be revealed.” Now, this wasn't the reason the false teachers chose to leave. Rather, this points to God's plan behind their leaving. They left of their own volition, but behind they're leaving was God's divine purpose. God intended to make a clear distinction between the true and the false, between truth and error, between true Christians and false Christians.

Listen carefully to 1 Corinthians 11:19, in fact, if you haven't, you might want to jot that reference down, it's really important, 1 Corinthians 11:19. Listen to Paul, this is shocking. Paul says, “...there must also be factions among you.” Paul, what do you mean? “There must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.” You

see, God, in His providence, allows these issues to rise in every generation, and often many times in a generation, that suck off the false. God is about cleaning and purifying and protecting the true church. And so, these issues come up and what happens? True believers stay with the truth, and the false believers are pulled off to follow that error. Verse 19 says, “They went out so that it would be shown that they all are not of us,” (Paraphrase). God intended that the departure of false Christians would make it clear that they “all are not of us.” In other words, that none of them were true Christians.

Now, in our day, folks, if you've been a Christian for twenty years, you've seen this happen. Just think with me for a moment back in your minds through Christian news. Over the last twenty years, we have seen evangelical leaders defect from the faith once for all delivered to the saints to attach themselves to a false church, and it unsettled some believers. We saw within the last twenty, twenty-five years, we've seen the Emergent Church, it's such a distant memory many of you don't even remember it. But yes, it happened. And what happened? You had people come along who embraced a false gospel. They're gone. Now they're attached to who knows what.

Now, some have embraced or are embracing a radical form of social justice that puts them at risk of drifting off from the true church because they're redefining the gospel. And let me tell you something, you will see others. If you live any time at all, you will live to see others just like this; don't be frightened, John says. When there are defections from true churches, whether it's some high-profile Christian, or sadly, it's someone you know and love, someone in your

family, remind yourself that it reflects God's plan. It just means we're living in the last days; the end is coming. False Christians defect, often from true churches, to join false churches.

But the other side of that is this, verse 19, tells us also that true Christians remain committed to true churches. Notice what he says in verse 19, "...if they had been of us (if they were real Christians), they would have remained with us." True Christians remain committed to true churches.

Now, very quickly, what are some key implications from this text for us? There are several, really important lessons for us; let me give them to you quickly.

Number one, every true Christian should and must belong to a true church. This is the New Testament; this is what believers do. They find a church that preaches the scripture that preaches a biblical Jesus and a biblical gospel, and they hang close; that's what Christians do.

And that brings me to number two, belonging to a true church is a test of your faith. Think about that for a moment, do you continue to believe, and do you continue to associate with others who believe in the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel? Now, this isn't alone the final proof; we haven't even finished the doctrinal test yet. We've got more verses here. There are other vital signs that come into play. And remember, I've told you that there are three tests in 1 John, and they're like a three-legged stool. Take away any one of them and your claim to be a Christian collapses then into rubble. And so, this isn't the only test, but it's an important test.

Number three, these verses explain why people defect from true churches to join false ones. You know, when you see this happen, when you see this happen in the news with some high-profile evangelical leader, sadly, when you see it happen in your own family or friends, don't be surprised and now you understand why. It's because they were never truly Christians at all.

Number four, the visible church is not the same as the invisible church. Now, what do I mean by those terms? Those are theological terms. The visible church is what you see; this is the visible church that is Countryside. Okay? We're all here connected to the church and connected as we claim to Christ. This is the visible church. But the invisible church is those who are truly Christ's. So, all over this world, there are people who claim to be Christians, they are the visible church, but not all of the visible church are the true Church. To say it differently. Not all members of local churches are members of Jesus Christ. John Stott put it this way, "They share our earthly company, but not our heavenly birth."

Now, practically, this means that false Christians attend true churches, false Christians attend true churches, like Countryside. They pass the doctrinal test; they affirm what Scripture teaches about Jesus in the gospel, but they have never personally repented, or believed in Jesus themselves. They're not following Jesus Christ; they pass the doctrinal test, but they fail in either one or both of the other tests. Either there is no obedience to Jesus Christ and His Word, or there is no love for God and His people. They are the tares Jesus described in Matthew 13, that grow up among the wheat and, for a time, look like the real thing. In fact, it's hard to tell the difference. Only at the judgment will the truth be made known and there are lots of false Christians in true churches. Remember Jesus said in Matthew 7:22-23, at the judgment, "Many

will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, we know you, we belong the Countryside Bible Church’” (Paraphrase). And what's the Lord **going to** say? “I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME.” Now, true Christians don't have to fear that because Jesus explains who they're going to be. Listen to the next phrase, “DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE **(WORK)** LAWLESSNESS.” In other words, He's saying, “Here's the person that's **going to** hear that, the person who says, ‘You're my Lord,’ but doesn't do what I say.” So, don't be afraid, Christian, true Christian. But there are plenty of false Christians in true churches.

It also means that there are many false Christians who eventually defect from true churches. They're a part for a time, but they eventually leave to connect to a false church and those in false churches. Think about this wisely; you know, we interact with people who are connected to false churches, and it looks like they pass two of the tests. You go, “Well, that's a pretty good person. I mean, they live a decent life, a moral life. And they appear to love others. I mean, look at all they do for the community, look at all that they do to serve the people in their church.” Okay, that's two of the tests; but what about the third one, the doctrinal test. Look, if they appear to have moral lives, and they appear to love people, but they don't pass the doctrinal test, if they worship a different Jesus, if they believe in a different gospel, they're not Christians!

Number five, these verses emphasize the perseverance of the saints, and this is for our encouragement. Most of us here are followers of Jesus Christ. This passage is written for our encouragement; it's written for those, not who left, but those who stayed, those who stayed connected to the true Church and to the true teaching of Christ and the true gospel. Mark, chapter 13, verse 13, says, “...the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” This is talking

about perseverance; it's not that you earn salvation by perseverance; it's that you give evidence of salvation by perseverance. Perseverance is not the cause of your salvation; it's the proof of it.

If you're really saved, then you're going to remain committed to Jesus Christ and His gospel.

John Stott said, “Those who belong to us, stay with us.” Future and final perseverance is the ultimate test of a past participation in Christ. In other words, you want to know whether or not you really were saved, that point you claimed to have been? Do you continue to follow Christ? Do you continue to believe? Do you continue to believe the true gospel? John Calvin puts it this way, “Those who fall away have never been thoroughly imbued with the knowledge of Christ, but only have had a slight and passing taste.”

True believers persevere. Good news for you; if you have believed the biblical Jesus and the biblical gospel, if you're passing the tests of 1 John, then you will persevere; you will make it. How? How in the world can we, as weak as we are, make it? Turn to Philip's text from last Sunday, 1 Peter, chapter 1, I love this; 1 Peter, chapter 1, verse 5, here's how we persevere. He says, we are, first of all, “...protected by the power of God.” In other words, we're **going to** make it because God's power keeps us. And the human side is this, “...through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

So, God protects us; God protects our faith, and we keep on believing because He does protect our faith. Philippians 1:6, “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Paraphrase). Christian, you will persevere; if you're the real deal, you're **going to** keep believing; you're **going to** keep trusting Christ and His life and His death

and His resurrection; you're **going to** keep following Him; you're **going to** keep connecting to others who believe as you believe. And that's **going to** happen, ultimately, not because of you, but because of Him. I love the song that we sing; here's why you'll persevere Christian, “He will hold me fast.”

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this amazingly insightful text. Lord, we don't like to think about these things, we don't like to reflect on the reality, but, Lord, thank you for protecting us, for helping us not to be frightened, for giving us insight and understanding so that when it happens, and it will happen, we understand that it's inevitable because this is ultimately Satan's work to sow tares among the wheat, and it's your grace, to root some of them out, and to protect and to preserve your people. Lord, thank you that our hope, ultimately, is not in ourselves, our own power, our own capacity, our own faith, but in our Lord's power to keep us. Thank you that we are in your hand, and nothing can pluck us from your hand.

Father, I pray for those who are here this morning who haven't passed the tests, whether the doctrinal test, or the test of obedience, or the test of love. Lord, help them even this morning to recognize that they are not Christians at all. And may they throw themselves, even this morning, on your mercy and find true forgiveness, true change, and everlasting joy in Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray, Amen.