

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

When “Christians” Walk Away

1 John 2:18-21

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Seems superfluous to add another word of greeting and thanks to the people who are here for Shepherds' Conference, but this is my opportunity to do that—friends from Michigan, friends from Florida, friends from Norway, friends from Canada, friends from India. I couldn't begin to name you all by name, but it is great to have you here and to enjoy your fellowship throughout this week and to be able to gather around God's word here this morning.

I thought about what am I going to do here to speak today, knowing that there would be a lot of people from Shepherds' Conference and then decided to simply pick up where we are at in GraceLife in the exposition of 1 John—that's the easiest and the best thing to do. Providentially, this text is what God has for us this morning in GraceLife and I am delighted to be able to bring it to you.

Turn to 1 John if you would. Some people came to me and I talked to them, and they said “Yeah, last year you were in 1 John, where are you now?” (laughter) I shrugged my shoulders and said “well, it's chapter 2 now.” There are reasons for that that my friends would understand.

But 1 John is a magnificent epistle and the more that I study it, the more time that I spend in it, one of the key things that you have to understand is that the apostle John is writing this to encourage beleaguered Christians in their walk with Christ. He is writing to help those who are under his apostolic care. He is writing to help his readers achieve spiritual victory in a hostile world and he is writing to them as one who loves them, one who cares about their spiritual life. And it would be a mistake of tragic proportion to view this letter as written by someone who is simply a referee ready to throw a flag on any infraction that he sees in his readers. Far to the contrary, this letter is written by a man whose love is filled with pastoral love for people that he is writing to. Over and over and over again, he calls them my little children, he says my beloved, he calls them brethren, he tells them I know that your sins have been forgiven, he says I write to you because you know the truth. He is affirming them in their Christian life in profound spirit inspired ways that could have only been water on their thirsty souls.

Understand that when we read 1 John, we are reading a letter that God wrote through the apostle John to help these Christians know joy, to know holiness and to know assurance of their salvation. This is a magnificent letter that ascends to the greatest heights that the apostle of love ever reached. He is using, as we read this letter, his apostolic authority and his pastoral love to protect them and to help them. This is a letter designed for great encouragement and it has the same affect on us today as we read it 2000 years later.

But why is such a letter necessary? Why all of this love poured out upon his readers? Why all of this attention on their spiritual needs? When you go through this letter, you realize that Christians live in a world that is hostile to their spiritual well-being. Christians live in a world that hates Christ and hates them, John says in no uncertain terms. They live in a world that opposes biblical truth. They live in a world that tempts them to sin. They live in a world that is filled with opportunities for discouragement and despair. The challenges of living the Christian life are huge and John writes to show them how to live a godly life and how to have an encouraged heart as they walk with Christ in the midst of an alien and a hostile environment. This is a word that all of us need even here today.

In unfolding of the text, what is in front of us now in the passage that we are about to read, there is a particular threat that John is going to address to their spiritual well-being at the time that he wrote, it was an urgent matter of concern for them, a particular threat, a particular cause for confusion, a particular cause for doubt that he wanted to address. Not because it was an academic matter to them, but because he had this great profound pastoral love for the people that he was writing to and he wanted to help them and build them up and edify them and encourage them. It is the spiritual threat that we see in our day today, it is a spiritual threat that has gone on through the ages and will go on until Christ returns, particular threat of when professing Christians and particularly professing Christian leaders abandon the faith—proclaiming Christ for a long period of time and then up and walking away. How are we to understand that?

Listen, this is a matter of current and urgent need even in the evangelical church today. It was only three short years ago that the president of the Evangelical Theological Society resigned his position in order to embrace Roman Catholicism. There was another well-known former Bible teacher, an expert in original languages and the texts of the manuscripts that underlie our modern Bible, he now denies the resurrection and calls himself a happy agnostic. He says that 19 of the 27 books of the New Testament were forgeries. What do we make of such men? What do we make of Christian leaders who defect from the faith? What do we make of our own fellow Christians that we know or loved ones perhaps who seem to name the name of Christ over a period of time and then they just walk away in to sin or false religion—what do we make of that?

The questions that that phenomenon raises in our minds are important ones. Do these people somehow lose their salvation? More particularly and for the arrogant men in academic circles who abandon what they formerly taught and to go out on the talk shows circuit to undermine the scriptures, we might ask, did they discover truth that the rest of us have missed and their expert learning lead them in to something that really shows Christianity to be the lie all along and now they alone have entered in to the reality of it. Should we follow after them? Is our confidence in Jesus Christ, is our confidence in the word of God misplaced? Have we been played for the fool by those who simply want to control us? Maybe, just maybe, if we got in on their expert secrets, we walk away too if we were only as enlightened as they were—what about it?

Those were the kinds of questions that John's readers were facing 2000 years ago, there are the questions that come up in the minds of sincere humble believers as they see people they thought they knew and people that they thought they could trust walking away and they are left as it were, holding the bag.

My friends, it is essential to a mature Christian walk to understand the reality of spiritual defectors and to know how to respond to it. That's the point of our passage this morning found in 1 John chapter 2 beginning in verse 18, a magnificent foundational text for understanding the spiritual war, the spiritual combat that we are all engaged in. What do you do when Christian leaders go AWOL? This text unfolds it for us, a blessed gift from God to His church through the apostle John. 1 John 2:18-21, follow along with me, John says:

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, having 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.

In theological terms, we are dealing with the problem of apostasy, the deliberate abandonment of the Christian faith. John's readers had seen some men, including some of their leaders within the Christian assembly leave the fellowship and teach different doctrine about the person of Christ than what they had received from the apostolic circle. Now look, Christians can be shaken under these circumstances and shaken to the core. And in the room of this size, some of you have experienced that and been severely shaken by that at some point in the past if not even now. Understanding the spiritual forces at play in those situations is part of achieving spiritual victory in a hostile world.

I want to structure this message today around three main points that come right out of the text. I want you to write this down if you are going to take notes, John deals with:

1. The Expectation of Spiritual Defection

In other words, this is to be an expected part of Christianity, an expected part of what the faithful have to deal with. Look at verse 18 with me again, he says:

Children, it is the last hour...

He is addressing them again with the term of affection, he is giving them a sense of his authority. He is going to walk them through as a father leads his child through difficult terrain. He is going to walk them through difficult spiritual terrain that is in front of them as they contemplate these men who have taught falsely and have now left the community, left the church. He says:

Children, it is the last hour, and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared...

When he says it is the last hour, he is referring to the fact that this is the age between the first coming of Christ, His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension, the

beginning of that age and the first coming of Christ and this present age goes to the second coming of Christ when He returns, an event of uncertain timing that is still future to us today, it is the last hour, this is the part of the unfolding of the plan of God over the course of history. And what he is alluding to when he says “Just as you heard that antichrist is coming...” he says one of the marks that the end of this present age will be the rise of the world figure that he calls the antichrist, “the antichrist” that is the term that only apostle John uses in his own letters, but the concept, though used by different names, the concept is found elsewhere in the scriptures. I am going to take you to only one passage to illustrate this for the sake of time. Turn back to the letter of Paul, the second letter to the Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians is where I want to direct your attention to for just a moment to help you see what it is that the apostle John is referring to, that he says what is familiar to his readers at that time. 2 Thessalonians 2, beginning in verse 1—we will stay here for just a second. Paul said:

Now we request you brethren with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not quickly be shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us to the effect that the day of the Lord is come. Let no one in any way deceive you (Paul is dealing with this whole matter of deception as well.) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being god.

That is the same figure that John is referring to in his letter here. He is referring to that end times figure, that world leader who will oppose Christ at the end of the age. And John says this is familiar teaching to you, you have heard about this, you have been instructed by this it is shown as “Just as you heard that antichrist is coming...” He reminds them that this age is moving toward the rise of the final antichrist who will oppose Jesus Christ at the end of the age.

Now for all of that, that simple point is very incidental to John’s purpose in writing the letter here. He simply incidentally reminding them of that coming end-age figure to set the stage to help them deal with the immediate circumstances, the immediate crisis in their community as he wrote this letter. John, remember, is counteracting false teachers in this letter. He is strengthening these believers against false teachers who were undermining their faith and that is his primary purpose in writing this letter. It is not an eschatological treatise, it is a pastoral letter, designed to help these people know how to deal with false teachers who were confusing them. And what he says is in no uncertain terms, he compares those false teachers and he says the spirit of opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ that will one day in the future animate the antichrist supreme. He says, remember that, remember that teaching that you know, this opposition to Christ that is coming? He says, just work out the implications of that and understand that that spirit of opposition to Christ is what is at work in these false teachers who are teaching false doctrines about your Savior. These false teachers were saying Jesus was not truly God incarnate in human flesh. We have talked about that in the past. Their false view of Christ and His humanity was not real, it was not complete. If you look at 1 John chapter 4, beginning in verse 2, you can see this and you can see what is on the apostle’s mind when he says this in chapter 2, verse 18. Remember we are talking about the expectation of spiritual defection here this morning.

1 John 4:2, he says:

By this you know the Spirit of God, every Spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist of which you have heard that is coming and now is already in the world.

That spirit that is going to animate the final culmination of this age is now present and at work in the church, he says. He says don't be surprised by this, you know the ultimate antichrist is coming, now just understand and work out the implication that is opposition to Christ is at work now. Why is that so important? I have had so many people through the years tell me "You know is God going to send me to hell just because I got my view of Christ wrong?" Well, yeah! If you teach false Christ, if you believe in a false Christ, you have a false salvation, you have no salvation at all. You don't have the true savior unless you have the true Christ. And these false teachers, animated by the devil himself, were opposing Christ in a different way than in a directly analogous way. They were opposing Christ by teaching lies about Him. They were opposing the saving purpose of Christ by leading people away from a true knowledge of Christ and in that sense, they were antichrists, they were opposed to Him. They were undermining the very purpose for which Christ came.

Yes, you better get your doctrine of Christ right, you bet because if you teach a false Christ, you teach a false salvation, you lead men to hell. What more can an antichrist do than to lead people away from Christ and in to the eternal destruction of perdition. That is the embodiment of opposition to Christ and that kind of opposition calls for a strong response, not vicissified language of academics that affirm these people as they go out and thank them for their prior service and all of that. The apostle John would know none of that today if he were here. He would say, there goes the antichrist. He would probably give them a boot on the way out. But these false teachers have left, as we read 1 John, chapter 2, they have gone out and now their departure had the potential to create doubt and confusions for the true Christians that were left behind, these ones that John calls children, little children, beloved, my brethren. His love for them is going to call for his strong response in identifying these false teachers as antichrists and rightly so and then he is going to come alongside and put his arm around them and help them walk through the maze that these false teachers left behind.

I wanted to deal with the questions that plague tender, young believers when they see these things happening. "Should we leave too?" "Have I missed something?" "Have we been deceived?" "These were the ones who were ahead of us and they left, now what do we do?" There is a vacuum left behind and John is stepping in to fill that vacuum. And in the gracious love of God, and I say the gracious love of God because John was animated by the Spirit of God as he wrote this letter, he is expressing the love of God for His church, the love of Christ for His sheep is shining forth in all of its glory here in this passage. We see the tender guidance and protection of our good Shepherd for His sheep coming through in this passage, the very same Spirit of love and guidance and protection that should animate every pastor that claims the name of Christ who lives the flock of Christ's people today. God gives us people to guide them, to protect them, to lead them, to love them and that's what the apostle John is doing here.

So what is he saying to them? I love this, I absolutely love this. As the spiritual elite walk out and mock the name of Christ and undermine the faith of those who love Him, John comes alongside these who were not many noble, not many wise, but babes as it were and he assures them that their doubts were unnecessary. He assures them that their confusion and their uncertainty can be laid to rest and that confidence and assurance of Christ and assurance of salvation can still be the mark of their life even though they have been betrayed by their leaders. He says, you can understand these false teachers if you simply put it in the context of the Bible's predictions about the final antichrist who will one day come true. That spirit of opposition that is future is just at work now, this is to be expected. The Bible tells us to expect this problem of false teachers arising from within the church itself. This is nothing unusual, this is not an unexpected phenomenon. This does not mean to shake us from our faith at all. This is simply affirmation of what the Bible said would happen is coming to pass. Why would that be a cause of concern, a cause of doubt to us? Far to the contrary, if you remember back in the book of Acts when Paul was leading the church of Ephesus and he was speaking to their elders, I'll just read it quickly. He is speaking to their elders and in verse 28 he says:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood...

The church of God, purchased with His own blood, these sheep belong to Christ and the shepherds were appointed on behalf of Christ to protect them. He bought them with His own blood, how could we betray that trust, it's unthinkable. Notice what he says in Acts 20:29 as he is speaking to the elders:

I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock and from among your own selves, men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

From among your own selves they are going to speak perverse things and draw the disciples away. This kind of spiritual defection is the expected part of the spiritual battle that we are involved in. Men who should know better are going to go AWOL, are going to desert, are going to betray the cause of Christ. The apostle Peter in 2 Peter 2:1 said this:

The false prophets also arose among the people just as there will also be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresy, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

When we see these prominent leaders depart, understand that this does not change anything about your walk with Christ, it does not change a single thing. This is an expected part of the unfolding of the purposes of God in His church.

Now, the question is, remembering the overall purpose of the apostle John in this letter is to help his readers achieve spiritual victory in the midst of the hostile world, how does that understanding help, how does it help to know that spiritual defection is an expected part of the unfolding of God's purposes? Simply this, profoundly this beloved, you do not need to question

your faith when someone else abandons what they formerly professed. You do not need to be plagued with doubt when someone prominent tries to destroy the faith that he once proclaimed. These spiritual defectors, these apostates are the exact reverse of the apostle Paul. I was thinking about this this morning and I am thinking about it now—that's why I'm going to say this. The apostle Paul, you remember, before his conversion tried to destroy the faith and after he was converted and went out and started preaching Christ, they said he was proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy. With these spiritual defectors, we have just the reverse, they are trying to destroy the faith they once proclaimed.

And the Bible says to all of us who love Christ, all of us who have been born again by the Spirit of God, all of us who love His word and our names are written in heaven, the Bible says to us when we see people like that, don't be shaken from your position since we exercise some discernment. It is not surprising that there will be forces in the church that oppose Christ and His people. This is simply an indication that we are living in the last hour, we are living in an age where opposition to Christ is going to be prevalent, it is going to happen. And when you know in advance, when you are prepared in advance that this is going to happen, then you don't have to be shaken from your firm foundation no matter how treasonous and vile these men may become, you can still stand firm. What they do has not changed anything for you. As our Lord said to Peter in John chapter 21, if they go that route, what does that have to do with you? You follow me and you simply put your feet down even more firmly and say "This is where I stand, I'm not moving. If you go, go, I'm not following you, I'm following Christ." And that expectation of spiritual defection equips you for what lies ahead.

Now next point this morning:

2. The Explanation of Spiritual Defection

So the expectation of spiritual defection, that is the natural expected part that the New Testament tells us to expect these things. Secondly, the explanation of spiritual defection.

What are we to make of these people who depart from their prior commitment to Christ, their outward commitment to Christ? Did they lose their salvation? Were they true Christians and suddenly lost? Did they discover the truth that we have overlooked?

These questions are understandable when someone prominent leaves the faith. But the Bible here in this passage teaches so clearly what the spiritual reality is and you must, you absolutely must interpret these kinds of defection through the lens of God's holy word rather than what these false teachers say about their own defection. You start with scripture, you interpret reality by the scriptures not what some betrayer of Christ says caused him to leave the faith. Go to God's word to understand and the clarity and the spot light of scripture will make this evident. Look at 1 John 2:19, because the Bible teaches clearly that people who make a deliberate and final departure from Christ were never truly saved to begin with—that is cut and dry, that is black and white, that is obvious as it could possibly be. Look at what John says in chapter 2:19, he says, speaking of these false leaders and those who went out after them, he says:

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.

They went out because they truly did not share our life, they never shared it to begin with, is what he says. Their departure, their voluntary departure from Christ, the voluntary abandonment of the faith revealed their true character, it shows what they were all along. They were of us in the sense that they outwardly identified with us for a time, they said that they believe what we believe, they said that they shared in the life of Christ, they were in that sense part of the visible church, the church that men can see as it gathers together, but they were not of us in an internal, real, spiritual sense. They did not share our Spirit of God, they did not share the spiritual life, they have never truly been regenerate. There is a distinction between the visible church, those who associate with believers and the invisible church, those who truly believe, those who share the Spirit of God which He puts in every true believer at the moment of salvation.

The apostle John here is pointing to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. That doctrine teaches that God will secure and keep true believers in the faith all the way to the end and keep them from apostasy, He will keep them from falling away. Salvation is a work of God and God finishes what He starts. Phil preached on this just a few weeks ago from Philippians 1:6, Paul setting forth the certainty of his confidence, he says:

For I am confident of this very thing that He who began a good work in you, will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

(Chapter 2:13) For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Now beloved, think with me, think about the magnificent realities that scripture reveals about the work of God in salvation. I can only give you a thumbnail summary here, but it will be enough to see the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, it must be true, it is true.

If you are a true Christian, I use the second person instead of the first person plural, I can say God did this to you or I can say He did it to us, I'll make it personal to assume your salvation as I say these things. God Himself chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world. Beloved, meditate on these blessed truths. God set His eternal love on you. Christ's work on the cross on your behalf forever turned the wrath of God from you. Jesus Christ is now before the throne of God in heaven, interceding on your behalf. You have the indwelling Holy Spirit within you beloved. Those divine realities revealed for certain in the truth of God's word, those divine realities guarantee that true believers will continue in the faith because it is all about the work that God has done in you not the work that you are doing for God.

Yes you may struggle, yes you may be sorely tried and tempted, yes true believers can fall in to sin, even grievous sin, but the point of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is that true Christians will never finally turn away from Christ. True Christians persevere because God finishes what He starts.

Romans 11:29:

The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

John 10:27-29:

No one can pluck us from His hands.

Romans 8:38-39:

Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Samuel 15:29:

The Lord is not a man that He should change His mind.

So when John says:

If they had been of us, they would have remained with us...

Behind that statement is the reality of the work of God in salvation from eternity past to eternity in the future and all points in between. True salvation can never fail because of the work of God and the lives of the redeemed.

And so, when someone deliberately and in an informed way abandons Christ and says “I no longer believe that, I no longer want to follow Him, I will not have this man reign over me, I deny the Bible, I deny the resurrection,” beloved those are things that cannot come out of the mouth of the redeemed in a final sense—that’s impossible. True believers can’t depart like that. And so when someone like that leaves, all that has happened is that their true spiritual state all along has been unmasked. You and I may have been deceived for a long period of time by the mask that was over their face, but when they left, they stripped the mask off and left and said “this is what I’m really like.” By their actions, that’s what they say even if they try to cloak it in the language of humility in their own personal pursuit of truth—give me a break! That is damnable, that kind of apostasy is utterly damnable, that is unthinkable. You would betray Christ, you would betray the one who you used to say died on your behalf, the one who set His love upon you. You would betray like Judas Iscariot? No, you would never go that direction, the work of God guarantees it. No way, no matter what you say about what you formerly believed, the truth is as John says it here, you were never of us because if you had been, you would have stayed with us because God makes every Christian in to a new creation and He keeps them.

Now, we understand that for those of us that are here and walking on earth, sometimes it is hard to see, we get surprised by this. Understand that Jesus’ disciples had that problem with Judas Iscariot. He had moved among the disciples for three years, they had seen him up close. But during that time, they never suspected him to be anything other than a faithful disciple, so much

so when Jesus told the 12 at the Last Supper that one of them would betray Him, John 13:22 says the disciples were at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. Jesus said one of you is going to betray me and all eyes did not turn to Judas. Indeed in Mark it says “Lord, truly is it not I.” They had no idea, his hypocrisy was so convincing that they had no idea.

But beloved, the point of this is that when men defect, you do not need to doubt the reality of the Christian faith, God has revealed the explanation for it. Their departure only shows the preexisting perversion in their own hearts. They may have fooled us, but they never fool Christ. 2 Timothy 2:19 says “The Lord knows those who are His.”

Now, as a practical matter, practical word of encouragement, this is very important. If a defector raises questions about Christianity that you have never thought about before, don’t panic, you don’t need to panic over that. Godly pastors and Christian thinkers have been dealing with the hard questions of Christianity for centuries. It is a conceit of any calculable proportions, a conceit of a modern mind to think that a 21st century rebel against Christ would suddenly come up with something that would overturn the scriptures, overturn the resurrection and overturn the thinking of great men throughout the halls of church history. It is a conceit of unthinkable proportions that a 21st century men would overturn the thinking of men like Augustine and Luther and Calvin, men like Edwards and Spurgeon and Ryle, men like Machen and Lloyd-Jones and MacArthur and Murray and others like them.

No, no, they might get their spot on a little TV talk show and be able to spew a little stuff and deceive the uninformed and unsuspecting. But beloved, if you can counter things that cause you concern, don’t panic. Just come back to those trusted men who for centuries have been explaining the scriptures, who have opened up the word of God, who have dealt with all of those hard questions, turn to them and then turn to Christ again with a fresh commitment and a fresh confidence in the fact that He is the way, the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father but through Him. You should never be afraid of what a defector says, there is no need for it. And if they raise questions and say “Ha, never thought about that before, there’s answers.” And when you see those answers, when you find those answers and you realize that these defectors simply ignored everything that would undermine their argument, they will be exposed for the hypocrites and the liars that they are. And you will be so incensed that you will join with the spirit of John and say “That’s the antichrist, how dare he lie like that? How dare he hide relevant information as he tells people to turn away from Christ—how dare he.” And when you have that sense of visceral reaction, you will be entering in to the spirit of the apostle who says these are antichrists. “Follow after them? No way, I will follow Christ.”

Now, there is another question as you think about the explanation for spiritual defection that John touching on incidentally here. Why does God allow this? Why does God allow this kind of spiritual defection? Why does God allow men to rise up from within the church and then depart and create this kind of confusion for a time?

John answers that question plainly in the text here at the end of verse 19. Look at it again with me, he says:

They went out so that (here is an expression of the divine purpose) it would be shown that they all were not of us.

Their defection only shows that the reality of God's purposes is at work. Get this, God Himself purposed their departure so that the truth about Christ would be clarified. When defectors raise questions and challenge the doctrines of the faith, those who are committed to the truth come back, they articulate the truth more clearly, they show what the truth has been all along and then these defectors are shown to be teachers of falsehood and truth is clarified as a result. And the dividing line between the true men of God and the false professors is made clearer and it simplifies things for the common believer on the street so to speak to know who to follow after. Think about it, this is a hard truth, but it is true. The church is purified when false brethren leave because their hypocrisy and their false teaching leave with them and what they meant for evil when they meant to raise the dagger against Christ, to plunge a cut in to His purposes, God turns it for good to build up His people, to purify them and to clarify truth from error. We serve an amazing God, the God of amazing wisdom.

And as a pastor I can say it is a whole lot easier to shepherd people who are united around truth. Look, if we had every emerging theory and every emerging guy in our midst and we had the spiritual seeker sensitive groups in here and we had the prosperity gospel people in here and everybody was being attracted, this would be a mess to try to direct because you would always be dealing with all of these falsehoods within the bounds of the church. When these men go out and separate themselves from the church and drag those who have no true interest in Christ with them, it makes the church pure and makes it able to pursue Christ with a single minded devotion.

...they went out so it would be shown that they all were not of us.

And now we have the opportunity to serve Christ and to pursue His words with the purity of purpose, united in the spirit intent on one purpose as Paul said in Ephesians.

Well, we have seen the expectation and the explanation of spiritual defection. I just want to expand on one final point here briefly in the 90 minutes that we have left. (laughter)

3. The Examination of Spiritual Defection

What I mean by this is that when you see spiritual defection taking place, it is an opportunity for you to step back and say "What is it that I believe again?" It is an opportunity to examine your own heart and to be reminded of the riches of Christ that belong to you. John had exposed these defectors in verses 18 and 19, he had explained what was going on. Now look at what he does in verses 20 and 21. This ties back to what I was saying earlier about his love and his affirmation of his readers. Look at verses 20-21, I absolutely love this. John never blurred in his mind the distinction between the false teachers whom he was refuting and those true believers that he was affirming and he does it beautifully here in verse 20, he says:

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.

Picture yourself as one of these believers who had teachers now on the outside saying “You are wrong, you need to come with us. We have the truth, you are simple and uneducated and you don’t know, you need to listen to our secret.” Imagine the greatness of the encouragement that would come when an apostle himself of the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you and says you have an anointing from the Holy One, you know the truth. Oh, that would just fill your heart with such gratitude and joy and shouting of happiness to hear that kind of affirmation from the apostle. It is the same way for us that know Christ today. When others defect, simply step back and remember, step back and think, step back and put this sudden defection in the context of what you have known to be true all along. Christ has set true Christians apart with the indwelling Holy Spirit—that’s what the anointing refers to. Christ Himself has given you understanding so that you might know the truth of God. You are not in a helpless, defenseless position before these defectors. They are the ones who are lying. They are the ones who don’t have the truth. You have the truth. You have the Spirit of God. You have the word of God. And that’s true of every believer, there is no secret club in true Christianity where people are enlightened and others are on the outside. He says you all have this anointing, you all know the truth, remember that. And as you remember that in the context of the spiritual defection, don’t you abandon the truth, don’t be intimidated. So what if these men have chosen to drink from the fountain of Judas Iscariot, you don’t have to drink from that poison well yourself. Their teaching does not show that you are ignorant, it shows that they are liars. You have all spiritual resources at your disposal, nothing has changed.

Turn back to the gospel of John for a moment. There are a couple of passages I want to show you real quickly in closing here. John 6:66, we looked at this in GraceLife a few years ago. Even in Jesus’ ministry, He dealt with defectors, in John 6:66 he says:

As a result of this, many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore.

Look how Jesus deals with this, look how He deals with those disciples who were still with Him, this is still the pattern today for you in your own walk with Christ:

Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?”

He is expecting the answer “no” He is simply drawing out their faith, he says, you see them leaving, you don’t want to go away also, do you? Peter speaks up and gives the answer, he says:

Lord, where would we go, you have words of eternal life, we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Beloved, oh beloved, when you are challenged by seeing men depart, denying the faith, abandoning it to sin, take that opportunity to bring forth your own faith, to confess and affirm your own faith even more. When others see reason to leave fine, your reason to stay. Remind yourself that God has given you a true knowledge of Christ, this Christ has words of eternal life, this Christ is the Holy One of God. Where would you go if you did leave? No, no, beloved, we

are blessedly confined to the Lord Jesus Christ. We know whom we have believed and we are convinced that He is able to keep that which we have entrusted Him until that final day. Defection simply brings you back to deeper commitment to Christ—that's where it leads you. And if the world is against Christ, these defectors are against Christ, in the words of Athanasius, then we are against the world, we are against the defectors because we are not going anywhere.

So seek the Lord, ask Him for grace and then rise, go forth and follow Him. It is not that complicated, but it is blessedly true.

Let's pray. Lord, keep us in the love of Christ. And if there be someone here today that has been with us but is not truly of us, convict their heart and bring them to faith in Christ. And Lord, as you exposed those antichrists, those imposters, make it plain to all that that is what they are. Frustrate their efforts to undermine the faith. Frustrate their efforts to undermine Christ. And as you frustrate them Father, encourage us and give us strength to stand so we might honor you and continue those things that we have learned and been convinced of. We love you supremely and exclusively and commit ourselves to you afresh just now. In Jesus' name. Amen.