

True Christians persevere in the Christian Church

Ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθον,
ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν·
εἰ γὰρ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν,
μεμενῆκεισαν ἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν·
ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν
ὅτι οὐκ εἰσιν πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν. (BYZ my emphases)

They went out from us,
but they were not of us;
for if they had been of us,
they would have continued **with us**;
but *they went out* that they might be made manifest,
that none of them were of us.
(NKJV my emphases)

There is an epidemic today of disorganized religion. Church membership is viewed with suspicion or contempt. It is viewed as optional, man-made, and unconnected with the nature of one's personal relationship with God. True accountability is seen as too restrictive and overbearing to many, and they therefore avoid and evade membership in a church. "It is none of their business what I believe, or what I do, who do they think they are to dictate what I am to believe, or how I live my life, that is between me and God." People would like church membership to be only as binding as all other consumer loyalties. They may come and go freely, with no contract, no restriction. It is an eminent expression of American individualism and autonomy. But this is simply not the Biblical picture of our relationship to the church. John paints a picture here of a real, vital, consequential connection of the true believer to the visible church. True Christians do not dangle lifelessly, connected at no particular place on the vine, nor do they fall dead to the ground, True Christians persevere IN the Christian Church.

T: Five times John uses the word "US", who is us?

1. There is a visible church with real membership –define visible and invisible church

- It is **not** going out of the invisible church – else someone lost their salvation –but the visible
- The visible is inextricably linked to the invisible – their going out showed...
- The formal is all implied in Scripture not an invention of man – particular form vs. formal
- Marriage is formal- the commitment is well defined and the form expresses the formal reality

T: There is therefore a visible church which the saints join, and which heretics leave, how do they leave?

2. What is the going out?

- Not every change of location, even sinful or foolish ones. – we don't abuse this text, nor should you
- Going out but not going away -Hopping- **v26, 2John 1:7-11**
- Repudiating core Christian truths **v22, 1Jn 4:1-3**
- Antinomianism **1Jn 2:3-4**
- By excommunication (**Mt 18:17**) or self-excommunication ἐξῆλθον active verb

T: That is *how* they leave, what is the consequence of it, what are the implications of it?

3. Leaving this membership is a mark of being unsaved

- He starts, "they went out from us, but they were not of us", i.e. were not saved- it is his proof
- Staying away and avoiding is not good –ask yourself *why*? Holier? Or Sin? –life / doctrine
- Being against 'organized' religion is not a good thing – God organized it
- Perfect agreement is not the criteria – you cannot swim this alone!
- Being excommunicated or self-excommunication is a sign of perdition

T: Leaving the church is a serious sin, and points to destruction, but

4. Remaining in this membership is a mark of being saved –"if they were of us..."

- God delights in Zion, and his children do as well **Ps 133, 122; 1Jn 3:14**
- Not only do true Christians remain saved, but they remain in the church
- Abiding in Christ includes abiding in his body –anything else is utterly inconsistent and contradictory

T: Living in true membership to Christ's body is a sign of being saved, and consequently,

5. No true Christian will remain outside the bounds of the visible church but will persevere in it

- "They would have remained **with us**"
- God inclines your heart to fear him and not depart –promise of the New Covenant
- You need the people of God in your perseverance **Heb 3:12-15**
- You may have stumbled sinfully and flailed foolishly but repent and remain in his body

T: Do not follow this foolish age of over-stressed individualism

Conclusion: Join the church, graft firmly into the vine, do not dangle, do not fall dead to the ground. Draw life and vitality from Christ as he feeds you through his body. *True Christians persevere in the Christian Church*, so get in the church, formally, fulfilling the whole picture that Scripture paints of the responsibilities, privileges, and duties to the visible local congregation. *True Christians persevere in the Christian Church* – So, Persevere in the Christian Church.