

1st JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 2:18-19

Lesson #8

Introduction

We're continuing our 1st John Bible study. Last week we finished chapter 2, verses 15-17, where John told us not to love the world, or the things in the world. He said that a continued love and desire for the previous ways of life are a certain evidence that no regenerating process had taken place in the person's heart and mind. Salvation is literally being saved from enslavement to our love for sin, that results in death. We discussed that there's a difference between being tempted by the pleasures of sin, and actually loving that sin. Those who are born again are still tempted by sin, and often fall victim to it, but they never ever love it, rather they agonize over their failures, and run to Jesus in confession and repentance. Those who are false proclaimers are still actually in love with those old ways, and desperately wish they could find a way to still practice them without suffering any penalty. Which leads to the things that John is refuting in this epistle.

Imposters Among Us

18 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. 19 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.

1 John 2:18-19 (NASB)

As we begin our study of these specific verses, it's important that we stay in context. Since we're starting half way through the paragraph we mustn't ignore all that's been written immediately before this. The broad format of the context is John's warnings of false teachers who have tried to introduce heretical and damaging errors into the church. Teachings that deny the tenets of our faith in Christ's deity and His bodily incarnation. And, that promote the practice of immoral behaviors as being tolerable under the guise of some mythical separation of body and spirit.

John has vigorously refuted these heresies by reaffirming the proper responses of true regeneration, which demonstrate the steadfastness of God-given faith, and the resultant purity of behaviors due to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit upon all those who have been chosen and redeemed by God. (1Pet 1:2) John says, in no uncertain terms, that those who are born again will be permanently changed by that experience, and a lack of enduring change reveals the insincerity of many professions of faith. And these verses are now a further continuation of that thought.

While John uses the coming of the antichrist as a reference, his thought isn't so much about the antichrist himself, but about that spirit which he represents, and what those things are that he'll be promoting. Furthermore, and probably most surprising, is that his activities will be prevalent in the very midst of the churches, and performed by those who claim to be our brothers and sisters. Our general thought is that he'll come in the form of violent persecutors, and make no mistake he uses this tactic, but he also uses clever deceptions and disguises as well. Many indeed are those in our very midst, who claim to be our brethren, but teach things that dishonor Christ and tempt us into worldly affections, usually for personal profit and attention.

When confronted with their errors these will not repent and confess their wrongs, but will argue their case with a perverted and twisted use of scriptures, born out of their ignorance of genuine spiritual truth, which they cannot grasp, and usually accuse their critics of some kind of sordid discrimination. A genuine faith is a teachable faith, that's humble, and responsive to the truths of scripture when they're rightly presented. Not gullible, but authentically teachable. Accepting that no one knows everything, and a desire for the truth makes a true believer willing to listen and consider the possibility that what they believe isn't necessarily the proper interpretation of what the scriptures actually teach. A true believer will show unmistakable signs that learning and knowing the truth is much more important than winning a debate and proving that they're right and their opponent is wrong.

And this gets us to the situation that John was addressing in this epistle. He says that when these false teachers were confronted with their errors, they refused to confess and repent, and were forced to go out from the church. John doesn't feel the need to further describe their actions because in leaving they demonstrated that they were never really believers

in the first place. And that's why they were made manifest, so that the church would know that these people who they trusted, were never really their brothers and sisters in the first place, but were enemy spies practicing their deceptions in the midst of the churches. If they were really of us they would have remained with us, says John. He means that they would not have abandoned the true faith and gone out teaching heresies for the sake of capturing a following and feeding their own ego's at the expense of the truth.

What he doesn't say, but we've come to see, is that now another church exists in that town that claims the title of Christian, but has rejected the tenets of the faith that would make that claim authentic. And as time moves on, there are more and more of these so called Christian churches, that have emerged based on their own particular variety of scriptural perversions and idiosyncracies. We tend to be sad because there are so many of these, but John says that this is actually a benefit to the authentic churches, because, it gives those false claimants a place to congregate, and moves their heresies and perversions outside the real churches that are remaining faithful to the truth.

While we rarely, if ever, think of it from this perspective, for every member of a false cult or aberrant religion, there is one less person occupying a place in the true Christian churches, and this certainly is sad on the one hand, but it's the wisdom of God at work on the other, protecting His own from harmful influences. There are no wasted resources in God's master plan, everything He's created has a specific purpose, and it always accomplishes that for which He made it. This is often beyond our ability to perceive, but we're told this by God in His holy scriptures. (Isa 46:8-10) All of the essential means of implementation are built into God's creation plan that will be needed to carry out the fulfillment of that plan. He made the plan, and He supplied the diverse means to fulfill it.

John tells us that many of those whom we've trusted, and believed in, will go out of our churches and pursue a false path of religion, or spiritualism, or worse wanton worldliness. He says this is so that we will know that they were never of us in the first place. This is an important point. John is not saying that they were actually once one of us, but have since changed their minds, but instead that they were never of us in the first place. Their leaving isn't proof that believers can be lost, but rather proof that those who leave their profession of faith never had any to begin with. Yes, many people make a profession of Christ that's not authentic. In fact, as little as one in ten usually prove authentic and stand the test of time. So says John Calvin, and this preacher speaking, and many others who have had long term experience with the churches.

(Make a comment about one's location and surroundings in regard to this general statement of percentages)

So, while a defection from the faith appears to be very commonplace when viewed from the perspective of the world, nevertheless, John says this defection is simply a proof that not every person who calls themselves a Christian really is one. (Mat 7:21-23) A perpetual lifestyle of obedience, and perseverance of faith, are the authenticating trademarks of genuine Christianity, and a defection from, or absence of these spiritual evidences is proof of insincerity.

As I was browsing some Christian ministry websites recently, I came across one where a young woman had written in and described a situation where her Sunday school teacher had used the verses from Hebrews chapter six to argue that Christians can lose their faith and salvation. She was asking how to answer this contrary teaching because her own knowledge of scripture wasn't yet sufficient for the task, but she knew that it ran contrary to orthodox teaching. Let's look at those verses because this is very much related to John's teaching in this verse. It says:

4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

Heb 6:4-8 (NASB)

These are very strong words, and the reader can very easily come away with the same conclusion that this Sunday school teacher did. But like all of scripture, so much of the meaning hinges on a single precept, and a mistake on that single precept radically affects the entire conclusion. The precept here is that one cannot be enlightened, and taste the heavenly gifts of the Holy Spirit, unless they have been fully regenerated. And I admit that I myself once struggled with this perception, but in fact that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews is describing. He's describing the people of Christ's

parable of the sower in Matthew 13, who initially received the word of the gospel with great joy and exuberance, but proved to be void of good soil, and fell away when either persecution, or the things of the world called upon them. In His explanation of this parable to His disciples, Jesus explains to them, in verses 18-23, that these people made an initial positive response, and actually tasted the benefits of that gospel word planted in their hearts, and joined for awhile with the true believers, but in spite of this, time proved the insincerity of their profession of faith, not their loss of it.

And what do we offer as further scriptural substantiation for this interpretation? Well for one, let's consider these verses from 1st Peter:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (NASB)

And if we want it from an even higher authority, how about these verses directly from the mouth of Jesus:

37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but [to do] the will of Him who sent Me. 39 "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." John 6:37-40 (NASB)

and again from Jesus:

27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 "I and the Father are one." John 10:27-30 (NASB)

Many people will come into our churches by a profession of faith, but then leave our Christian churches for another gospel, or another religion, or a life of sin. The scriptures readily acknowledge this fact. And John is telling us this in these verses. The scriptures tell us that many are called by the gospel, but alas, only a few are chosen by God as His Son's mate and His own family of worshipers. (Mat 22:14) Contrary to anything else we might think with our own intuition, this is the message presented in the holy scriptures. Romans chapter 9 is a sort of brief synopsis. In no case, and by no means, does the scriptures make provisions for the loss of a single one of God's chosen and saved children. Any teachings to the contrary are just plain wrong, because they violate numerous and immutable direct claims of scripture. Once saved, always saved, is as sound a teaching as is the immutability of the word of almighty God.

John tells us that many will pass through our churches in their journey of life, but the genuine will remain true to the teachings. But we must not make any false assumptions, this verse does not tell us that every false proclaimer will leave, but only that those who do leave are all false. And as we said earlier, this teaching is based on a premise that we're talking about the true church as John is describing; many true believers will have to leave professing Christian churches that abandon the true faith and become apostate. The true church isn't the name, or the building, or the pastor, but the people of God who are born again of His Spirit, and demonstrate that by an unwavering obedience, and faith in the truth.

In fact, there are often occasions where the true church has to leave what is the larger professing church, in order to remain faithful to their calling. The Protestant reformation is a classic example of a smaller group having to separate themselves from that which claims to be the church, but is so apostate as to negate any possibility of that claim. In this case those who went out were the true, and those who remained were the false. But this doesn't refute the scriptures, it simply demonstrates the diversity of situations where such separations are made unavoidable.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians not to maintain any relationships of a spiritual nature with unbelievers, but rather to come out of those false religions and not touch them. (2Cor 6:14-18) And make no mistake, denying the essential tenets of the gospel makes one an unbeliever by any scriptural definition of the term, no matter what one calls themselves or what church they attend. People come and go, names and denominations come and go, buildings are erected and buildings are destroyed, but Jesus Christ said that He would build His church, and nothing whatsoever would prevent it. (Mat 16:18)

The fact that many who profess Christ end up being apostate, and/or leaving the Christian faith isn't some kind of scriptural mystery or theological dilemma, it's proclaimed repeatedly, and described in detail. To assert that this means that one can lose their salvation, because the majority prove to be false, is done entirely from scriptural ignorance, and usually with a bit of malice. John's teaching in this, and other verses, is that those who are false will leave the church if they can't get their way, rather than submitting themselves to the authority of scriptures. And conversely, those who are true believers will seek to stay within the assembly, unless it becomes apostate itself, in which case they will separate themselves from it according to Paul's instructions in 2nd Corinthians 6:14-18. As the protestant reformers separated themselves from the apostate papal system. But don't be too quick to leave, if no one stays, then what will become of that church?

The emphasis of John's teaching is that those who abandon their original claim of faith are doing so because that claim was never valid to begin with. Jesus openly declares that He will not permit the loss of a single one of His followers. And, that all that the Father gave Him will come to Him in the course of time. So, everyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ, and then leaves, proves the insincerity of their claim, and we don't want to be insensitive, but if they're false then the church is better off with them identified and removed. The popular idea that it's better to have them remain in the church because they just might get saved may seem loving, but loving to whom, certainly not to Jesus Christ, nor God the Father, nor especially to the new believers in the church who will be damaged by these sin tolerant imposters. Our first obligation is to Christ and His truly redeemed disciples, not to sin loving imposters who claim to be seeking God. They're not seeking God, and His righteousness and holiness, they're seeking a way to escape His judgement by going to church.

The scriptural call to the church is to cleanse itself from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2Cor 7:1) The prevailing man-centered Arminianism has made us think that the church of Jesus Christ is really all about benefitting impenitent men, rather than about the glorification and worship of Jesus Christ, in all His holiness. But this certainly isn't the teaching of scripture. Our present day preaching and teaching seems to need a serious attitude adjustment, and that's readily available in the scriptures. Concerning the **purpose** and **priority** of all creation, Paul tells us this about Jesus Christ:

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven .

Col 1:15-20 (NASB)

So what does this have to do with the verses we're studying? Everything, because the whole purpose of life and reason for existence is summed up in these verses. Those who understand the reason that mankind exists, the purpose for which we were created in the first place, will not love the world nor the things in the world, but will strive to glorify Christ and worship God through unwavering obedience to His commandments, and faithful and submissive service under His headship over the church. They won't leave their faith for other pursuits. Any who do, never truly understood and believed in the first place. Defectors from the declaration of Christian faith were imposters from the start, and their presence was, and still is a defiling influence on our churches and a serious stumbling block to the genuine believers. It is better that they leave and find something else, than stay and spread their deceptions and discontent to other members who are genuine. No matter how nice a foreign spy may act, it's better to recognize him and remove him than let him continue. Because, despite appearances, he's not working for you but against you, and his efforts will not work out in your best interest.

There are legions of spies and false professor's in our present day churches. And we would be much better off if they were identified and separated, but the scriptures foretell that in the latter days, as John says these are, that even the churches will not tolerate sound teaching, but rather will call false teachers to be their pastors, who entertain them with pleasant words of comfort and reassurance, while intentionally ignoring, or even denying, the scriptural calls for repentance from sin and obedience to God. (2Tim 4:1-5) And only churches overflowing with unregenerate members will ever do this. John starts this verse with the observation that it is the last hour. Meaning not 60 minutes on a clock, but a period of time that ends in the final summation of the plan of God for this age. He says, just as they had been told that antichrist is

coming, even now many of those preceding signs are escalating, and that spirit which characterizes his nature is already working. And what is that nature? The nature of lawlessness. In fact, that's one of his names, the man of lawlessness. (2Ths 2:3) The nature of disobedience to the commandments of God. The nature of catering to the desires of worldliness, and the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life. (v.16)

Beyond any debate, the church must evangelize, because that's God's predestined means to bring His chosen to repentance and faith. But evangelism isn't the goal of the church, as we're often taught, but a tool to be used in the accomplishment of that goal, which goal, the scriptures declare, is to build His church of acceptable worshipers. (Jn 4:23) Jesus says that this is His Father's desire, and that which He seeks from mankind, true and acceptable worship. That will mean that there will be many troubling and painful separations and purifications along the way, but we exist to serve and worship a holy God, who calls us to be holy in all our behaviors as He is holy, (1Pet 1:15-16) Striving to do this, we will see many leave our churches, and perhaps we'll have to leave some of them ourselves if they depart from the truth, but our allegiance is to Jesus Christ, and our mandate is to love Him above all else, and demonstrate that love by unwavering obedience to His commandments.

But, as a balancing weight, and often a very difficult one, we're also told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together either. (Heb 10:25) Many a precious saint has had to deal with the difficulty of trying to maintain this balance, not the least of which is one of my all time heros, Arthur W. Pink, who spent his whole life struggling with this dilemma. Jesus first went into the synagogues and tried to reason with the people, but when His teaching was rejected, He had to cease this and meet outside that camp with just a few of His disciples who wanted the truth.

Now I realize that we've said a lot about just two verses, and probably extended our coverage area a little bit as well, but as we mentioned earlier, an error in just one premise can cause a complete wrong conclusion, and I want us to grasp unmistakably, what John's telling us, not just in these two sentences, but in his whole epistle. Many critics of Christianity use the defections of the large numbers of false proclaimers as proof positive that Christianity is just a clever myth, just pretty words and well devised hoaxes, that many come to see through and then leave. And this is what many of those false proclaimers will say themselves. This is just like those who used Christ's crucifixion as proof positive that He was an imposter. Because, how could meager men possibly succeed in crucifying the true Son of God? You see how missing just one little premise can cause a totally wrong conclusion. Not realizing that Christ came with the full intention of being crucified, these critics missed the whole point, and derived the wrong conclusion.

As the time of Christ's return, and even before that, His snatching away of His bride, draws closer and closer, the critics who are missing the point will continue to make false accusations and draw false conclusions. And there will be many who fall away from their earlier claims of faith, as Jesus himself told us about, concerning the seeds that fell on the rocky ground, and those that fell among the thorns. All this proves is that many who claim to be Christians are not what they claim to be, but it certainly doesn't prove that none are true.

And John tells us who are the true, they are those who remain with Christ and live under His headship authority. They love Jesus, and they love one another as demonstrated by accepting His teachings and commandments rather than those of mankind, or even themselves. Jesus said a true disciple must deny himself, meaning forfeit any and all personal feelings and preferences and opinions, no matter how strongly felt, if they contradict the word of God. He is our Lord, our Master, and we are His slaves, we do not get to challenge His authority, or amend His rules, or demand explanations. This is the nature of the relationship of mankind to Almighty God. And it is the only kind that He recognizes and accepts.

When speaking to His disciples on the mount called Olivet, Jesus told them what to expect in the latter times, which times John says these are now, even though they seem very long to us. And what did He tell them? To expect a massive turning to Christ, and a resurgence of righteousness, and great prosperity and brotherly love? What did He tell them? Well, He told them many things, and this is one of them. Quoting Jesus:

21 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

Matt 10:21-22 (NASB)

Can you see how John knows that there will be many defections, but that the true believers will always remain steadfast in their faith? Because he was one of those disciples standing right in front of Jesus when He spoke those words. John heard Jesus tell them that they would have a very trying and difficult path ahead of them, and sometimes even their closest family members would betray them, but the sign of authenticity was the endurance of all this to the end. Those who endured to the end would be saved. And, it's because they're born again (saved) that they do endure. (1Pet 1:3-5)

Perhaps this sounds like circular reasoning to you, but actually it's not. It's not the enduring to the end that produces salvation, it's salvation that empowers the enduring to the end. Enduring to the end authenticates salvation. These two statements are a declaration of the same thing. Those who endure to the end will be those who are protected by the power of God, through a saving faith that will not fail, and the end result will be their final salvation. Many will fall away during the journey, proving the insincerity of their profession of faith. John Bunyan's book, *A Pilgrim's Progress*, is probably the all time classic masterpiece concerning all the experiences, and the diverse perils, of a Christian on his pilgrimage to Celestial City. (A must read for every true Christian)

And such is our journey saints. We'll encounter many obstacles and temptations along the way. We'll probably take some wrong turns and have to make corrections. We'll probably even question our own sincerity at some point, but through all these things, we are protected by the power of God through the working of a saving faith that is the gift of God. And this precious gift of saving faith, will endure every trial and every temptation, and will see us through to the end of our time, and assure our safe entry into His eternal Celestial City. An eternal City that is made for those who earnestly hunger and thirst for righteousness, and abhor this defiled flesh that holds us captive until that day when we get our new bodies, that are incorruptible and undefiled, fashioned after His glorious body, which, as we've been promised, awaits all of those who love Him and eagerly await His return.

To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

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