

11. The Epistle of 1 John—2:19

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As we entered into Chapter Two of John's first epistle—he began by addressing true children of God who were maybe feeling guilty or even condemned because they had not conquered over certain sins in their lives that had a hold on them:

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

So, John wanted to comfort weak believers in Christ to assure them that God would forgive them if they confessed their sin to Him (1:9)—but he didn't want to comfort and give false hope to those who were *not* genuine believers in Christ either.

And so, he immediately followed these words of comfort and encouragement, with words designed to challenge those in the church who called themselves Christians but were living contrary to the commandments of God—

1 John 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

He went on to say—

1 John 2:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. ¹⁰ He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Please understand, John doesn't have 'backsliding' Christians in mind when he said this but—church-going *unbelievers* ('tares' among the 'wheat').

John declares in no uncertain terms, that any person who goes to church and calls himself a Christian but hates other Christians for whatever reason—is deceiving himself and still in darkness (unsaved).

After dealing with these 'counterfeit Christians', John once again, turned his attention to genuine believers in Christ—and challenged them to go on to maturity in their walk with God (verses 12-14)—

1 John 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him *who is* from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

The Word of God when studied and put into practice in a believer's life will cause them to *grow* and *overcome* the devil—but only if it is put into practice (James 1:22).

As we said a few weeks ago—the goal of Christianity is to *grow* into strong men and women of God who know His Word and can use it to defeat the wicked one.

But as we said last time—the quickest way for Satan to hinder or stop that growth altogether is thru worldliness!

So, this becomes 'ground-zero' in our battle with the devil (spiritual warfare)—a battle for control of our heart.

Or in other words, **Who or what are we going to love more—God or the world?**

Godly Christians defeat the enemy—worldly Christians are defeated by the enemy!

And so that's what John begins to warn the children of God to be on guard against—

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ **Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.** ¹⁶ **For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.** ¹⁷ **And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

Then John begins to talk about the danger of false doctrine being promoted by many false teachers who were in the world—but especially by those who had infiltrated into the church.

In verse 18 he makes mention of the *ultimate* false teacher that will come onto the world scene before Jesus comes back to establish His Kingdom upon the earth—

1 John 2:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ **Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming...**

The term "**last hour**" is a eschatological term, a reference to the "*last days*"—a time just prior to Jesus' Second Coming that will be proceeded by the coming of the Antichrist onto the world stage.

We know from Scripture that the '**last days**' officially began with Jesus' First Coming (Hebrews 1:2)—and will conclude with His Second Coming to establish His Kingdom upon the earth. But then John kind of '*throws us a curve ball*' by telling us that "**even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour ('last days')" verse 18.**

The "**many antichrists**" that John refers to are those false teachers that used Christ and Christianity as a 'platform' from which to teach their twisted "anti-Christ" false doctrine.

Concerning these false prophets and false teachers John says—



1 John 2:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ 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.

This is a principle that John emphasized in his Gospel and his Epistles—that genuine believers ‘**abide**’ in Christ.

The Greek word for ‘**abide**’ is *meno* and it means ‘*to continue*’ or ‘*to remain*’. Genuine Christians *continue* in the faith—phony Christians eventually show their true colors and *depart* from the faith. John and the other Apostles learned this principle from the Lord Jesus Himself when He first spoke it to the Pharisees in John 8:31—

John 8:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide [meno] in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

And then again to His own disciples on the night before He went to the cross in what we now call the famous, ‘Vine and Branches’ discourse.

John 15:1-2, 4-6 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. (Comment)

John picked up on this principle and used it in his first epistle as a mark of genuineness—

1 John 2:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore 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. ²⁵ And this is the promise that He has promised us--eternal life.

1 John 3:24 (NKJV)

²⁴ Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

This principle that genuine Christians continue in the faith, but phony Christians eventually show their true colors and depart from the faith—is woven throughout the New Testament.

Peter talked about these phony Christians when he said—

2 Peter 2:20-22 (NKJV)

²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

The reason a dog that has been taken from the streets to live in a master's house but who runs away and goes back to eating its own vomit; and a pig, even though it's been washed and cleaned up, returns to wallow in the mud hole because—it's the nature of dogs and pigs to act this way.

The reason people who come to church for a while and stop doing some of the sinful things they used to do eventually return to the filth of the world is because—that's their nature!

These people experienced some *reformation* (surface cleansing and change), but it stopped short of genuine *regeneration* (cleansing of the heart thru salvation) which would have given them a new nature with new desires.

In that regard they are like the Pharisees whom Jesus likened to 'white-washed' tombs—

Matthew 23:27-28 (NKJV)

²⁷ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. ²⁸ Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had warned some 'would-be disciples' that coming to the 'border' of salvation without crossing over—would be extremely detrimental to their spiritual health by leading them into greater bondage to the devil—

Matthew 12:43-44 (NKJV)

⁴³ "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order..."

The key word here is "**empty**".

In other words, you can "sweep" the house of your heart clean from some sins through reformation—but a '*clean*' house is not enough.

Warren Wiersbe—

"It is not enough to clean house; we must also invite in the right tenant. The Pharisees were proud of their "clean houses," but their hearts were empty! Mere religion, or reformation, will not save. There must be regeneration, the receiving of Christ into the heart".

Again, here is the danger of someone cleaning up their life a little through *religion* but stopping short of inviting Jesus to come in and live in their heart—their heart is susceptible to being filled with other spirits—evil spirits.

You see, the real problem with reformation is that the thrill and novelty of going to church and hanging out with Christian people—eventually wears off!

When that happens, the unregenerate person goes back to the old life because—they're not a new creation in Christ which means they don't have the nature of God within them!

But here's the real problem for them—once they know God's truth but then willingly turn from it, the end result is that they are in a worse place than before—much worse!

And that's what Jesus goes on to warn about—

Matthew 12:45 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first...

When we accepted Jesus into our hearts we received a new nature ('the divine nature'-2 Peter 1:4) and as such—"old things passed away and all things became new". (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The evidence of this began immediately in that the things we used to love to do (sin) we no longer desired to do; and the things we didn't want to do (church, Bible study, prayer, worship) now we love to do!

This is one of the most powerful evidences whereby we know that Jesus has moved in—we're abiding in Jesus!

Don't misunderstand, abiding doesn't make you a true disciple of Christ—it just proves that you are one:

John 8:31 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed [truly].

Many so-called disciples of Jesus, when He laid out the cost of true discipleship (taking up the cross and denying themselves) walked away and followed Him no more. These could also be some of those John had in mind when he said—

1 John 2:19 (NKJV)

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.

The evidence of salvation is continuing in the faith—

Colossians 1:21-23 (NKJV)

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight--²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard...

Continuing in the faith isn't a condition for maintaining salvation; it's the evidence of true saving faith in a person's heart. Understand, Paul is not warning true Christians that if they backslide and stop *continuing* in the faith—they'll be judged and sent to hell.

He is warning would be disciples (phony Christians) to get serious and to make a genuine commitment to Jesus—or else turning back they will be judged and sent to hell because they didn't really believe.

Hebrews 10:37-39 (NKJV)

³⁷ "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. ³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." ³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Those that don't '**abide**' (remain, continue in the faith) are what the Bible calls apostates.

Biblically speaking, an apostate is someone who claims to be a Christian (and really believes it at the time), continues in the faith for a while (often weeks or months—but sometimes years) and then renounces their faith in Christ and walks away from Christianity.

A recent example of this would be Joshua Harris. (Explain seeing Josh at Moody Church 20 years ago).

Joshua Harris went on to be the lead pastor of Covenant Life Church, the founding church of Sovereign Grace Ministries, in Gaithersburg, Maryland from 2004 until 2015 when he stepped down.

I read an article about Joshua Harris a few days ago—

"Harris wrote the best-selling 1997 book I Kissed Dating Goodbye, which rejected traditional dating and courtship, and also argued that any physical intimacy before marriage was sinful.

Earlier this month, years after having renounced the message of his book, Harris announced that he and his wife were separating (divorcing), yet intended to remain friends to help raise their three children. Then in an Instagram post last Friday, Harris announced that he no longer considered himself a Christian, referencing the biblical term "falling away" to describe his spiritual state.

"By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Many people tell me that there is a different way to practice faith and I want to remain open to this, but I'm not there now," wrote Harris in the Instagram post. He also expressed regret for his past opposition to homosexuality and same-sex marriage, explaining that he was "sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality.

"I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry. I hope you can forgive me," Harris added."

Hebrews 6:4-6 (NKJV)

⁴ For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

The key phrase, and the one I believe unlocks the correct interpretation of this passage, is the phrase "if they fall away."

The Greek word translated "fall away" is used only once in the N.T. and it means—"to deliberately, willfully and forcefully turn away (renounce)."

If a person has received the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and has experienced the work of God in their life, has been enlightened to the truth of God by the Holy Spirit and even tasted the power of God—if they should deliberately, willfully, and definitively turn their back on all of it, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance.

Notice that the writer doesn't say "*it is impossible for them to be forgiven*" he says, "*it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*".

"Yes, but he says it's impossible to renew them again to repentance—that means that they had already repented once and therefore doesn't that prove they were saved?"

➤ My answer to that is—"No, not necessarily".

Repentance means to have a change of mind.

It's possible for a person to recognize that their life is a mess and that they need "God" and so they come to church and begin to turn away from their sinful lifestyle—and yet not go all the way to salvation (the rich young ruler who came to Jesus in Matthew 19 proves that).

A person can come to church knowing that their life is going the wrong direction and begin to experience Hebrews 6:4-5 and even begin to show signs of change (repentance) yet still not go all the way to salvation.

How can you tell? They eventually go back to the way they were—but they wind up worse than before.

2 Peter 2:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

Matthew 12:45 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first..."

Hebrews 6:4, 6 (NKJV)

⁴ For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened...⁶ if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

Many commentators say that the reason these people can't be brought again to repentance is because they have heard the truth, they understand who Jesus is, what He has done for them and what salvation entails—but at one point they completely renounce whatever faith they had.

Their attitude at that point is, "*been there, done that*" and now they move on to try something new—atheism, hedonism, New Age mysticism or any one of a number of other "ism's" floating around in the world.

They can't be brought again to repentance because they *know* the truth but have *rejected* and *renounced* it—so there's nothing more in the way of information that we can give them that would cause them to change their mind (repent) and come back to Jesus.

And so, they become what the Bible refers to as *apostates*.

Hebrews 6:6 (NKJV)

⁶if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, **since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.**

This simply means that those who know the truth of the gospel yet turn their back on it are in essence saying, "*I don't need what Christ did for me; I believe my good works and/or my religious deeds and observances will get me into heaven.*"

In the case of the Jews the writer was addressing this epistle (Hebrews) to they were basically saying, "*Jesus is not the true Messiah and so the verdict concerning Him was correct—He deserved to die as an imposter and deceiver—He got what was coming to Him.*"

They agreed with those who killed Jesus, and they put Him to an open shame again.

"Shame" here refers to guilt—they declared openly that Jesus was '*guilty as charged*'.

The writer mentions this group again in Chapter 10—

Hebrews 10:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Now the idea that someone who comes to church for a while, begins to change but then walks away from Jesus can't possibly ever go on to be saved is deeply troubling especially if you know someone who fits that description.

But take heart because the passage may not be as iron clad as we might think at first glance.

Warren Wiersbe—

"You should note that the words "crucify" and "put" in Hebrews 6:6 are, in the Greek, present participles: "while they are crucifying ... and while they are putting Him to an open shame." The writer did not say that these people could never be brought to repentance. He said that they could not be brought to repentance while they were treating Jesus Christ in such a shameful way. Once they stop disgracing Jesus Christ in this way, they can be brought to repentance..." (get saved)

Is Joshua Harris an apostate or simply a backslidden Christian?

I don't know. Time will tell. Pray for him.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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