

2:18 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.

2:19 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.

The new age had dawned with the coming of Christ (2:8). The darkness was passing away (2:8, 17; Stott, 103). The crucial engagement between Christ and Satan has been won. Christians should now see themselves living in the last days, or as John calls it, “the last hour.” The last hour is a time period, whether long or short, that will usher in the termination of all time revealing the salvation that is promised. Evidence that the last days are present is seen in the brotherly love of the new age being expressed among believers (see notes on 2:8ff.) and the presence of antichrists (Stott, 103, also see 107–109 for the last hour).

John says, “just as you heard that antichrist is coming” (i.e. they had heard about the final rebellion against God led by an individual known as Antichrist—2 Thess. 2:3 ff.), “even now many antichrists have appeared.” What is true of the Antichrist is true of them. They will either claim the honors due Christ (they will put themselves in place of Christ) or they will oppose Him. Because there are multiple people who will appear as antichrists, almost every generation has believed that the Antichrist had appeared (such was the case with Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the temple in 68 BC).

The antichrists that John is speaking of, however, are not political rulers. They are not opposition from the outside as Antichrist is in the Apocalypse. Rather, they belonged to the church at one time—at least externally. It was impossible to distinguish them from the true believers. In 2:19 John says, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us (despite all superficial appearances to the contrary); 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.”

The long and the short of the matter is this: real Christians persevere. Those who leave the church give evidence of their true character by their leaving.

Light is shed in this verse about two important doctrines: the perseverance of the saints and the nature of the church (Stott, 105–106).

Perseverance is a sign of true faith in many places in the Bible. In John 8:31 Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.*” Hebrews 3:14: “*For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*” Mark 13:13 says that he who endures to the end will be saved, not because salvation is a reward of endurance, but endurance is a hallmark of the saved. The parable of the soil illustrates the same point (Matt. 13). In 1 John 2:24 John himself says, “*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.*” If the false teachers were truly believers, they would have remained. External membership is never proof of internal union (Brooke, 53). Perseverance isn’t designed to lull the indifferent into a false sense of security; it is an essential token of sanctity (Bruce, 69).

This also gives warrant for the distinction between the visible and invisible church. Some share our earthly company, but not our heavenly birth (Stott, 106). Jesus spoke of wheat and tares that existed side by side that were not sorted out until the end of the age (Matt. 13).

John says that their leaving was part of the divine purposes of God: “they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” That is, their leaving revealed who the true believers were.

2:20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know.

2:21 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.

Verse 20 affirms that the readers didn’t need to wonder if those who had left the church were teaching the truth or not for they already knew what the truth was. The verse raises two questions: What is the anointing? Who is the Holy One?

In the OT anointing was primarily done for the purpose of consecration—setting an individual or object apart for a particular sacred purpose (Exo. 29:7, 21, 29, 36; 30:26; 40:9, 10, 11, 13, 15; Num. 7:1; Judg. 9:8; 1 Sam. 9:16; 15:1; 16:3, 12,13; 26:11; 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Ki. 1:34; Psa. 105:15; Isa. 45:1, Ezek. 28:14, Zech. 4:14, etc.). Later, anointing came to signify the Holy Spirit coming upon someone so they could rule or prophesy (1 Sam. 16:13; Isa. 61:1). This OT background forms the background for the NT. In Luke 4:18 Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1 saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” Peter said in Acts 10:38, “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power. . .” In short, the Bible makes a connection between the Holy Spirit and anointing. The Bible also makes a connection between the Holy Spirit and us. Ezekiel, in speaking of the New Covenant, said that God would put His Spirit within all believers and cause them to walk in His statutes (Ezek.36:27). Joel 2 also refers to the New Covenant. It is quoted in Acts 2 which says, “‘in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind. . . even on my bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit’” (Acts 2:17–18; Joel 2:28–32; SEE FURTHER DETAILS BELOW—verses 26–27). These observations provide a strong reason to think that John is speaking of the work of the Spirit under the administration of the New Covenant. Protection against antichrists is the anointing of the Holy Spirit which they had received.

The Holy One could be either the Father or Christ. In the OT God is often called the Holy One of Israel; however, the parallel in 2:27, 28 favors it being Jesus, and fits closer to the passages in John 14–17 where Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. Jesus is also called the Holy One (Mk. 1:24; Lk. 4:34; Jn. 6:69; Acts 3:14; Rev. 3:7).

The reason that John wrote is because he can build on the truth which they already possessed. The truth is the general Christian truth that the apostles proclaimed, by which believers lived and produced genuine love and eternal life. If John could but awaken their knowledge, his task is done. They possess the means if they only use them (Brooke, 57). Knowing the truth is echoed in the promise of the New Covenant as well (see notes on verses 26–27).

The second reason for his writing follows. Since they have the truth they are capable of recognizing a lie.

2:22 *Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.*

2:23 *Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.*

John's argument flows from the lie that is not of the truth (2:21) to whom the liar is (2:22). The liar's Christological error leads men into darkness.

Belief in right doctrine is another test that can be used to determine if someone is a true believer. The fundamental test concerns his view of the person of Christ. He who denies the Son forfeits the Father (Jn. 10:30).

This is not simply denying that Jesus is the "Messiah"; the denial includes the full gamut of meaning given to the term by John. In John, when the name "Jesus Christ" is used, it is usually connected with "Son of God." Jesus is the Christ because He is the Son of God. He is from the beginning (Jn. 1:1). He is the Word of life (1 Jn. 5:20). He has appeared in history as a man (1 Jn. 1:1–3). Through Him we have access to the Father (1 Jn. 1:3). He is our Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1). From Him and the Father come grace, mercy, and peace (2 Jn. 3; TDNT, IX, 570). It is unlikely that the heretics denied the deity of Christ since that was part of the profession of faith that was required to be viewed as a believer (1 Jn. 4:15; 5:5; 13). Rather, the heretics probably denied that Jesus was God who had come in the flesh; that is, they denied that the eternal Son and the man were the same person. They apparently held some sort of view that "the Christ" came upon the man Jesus (perhaps at His baptism) and left Him before He went to the cross. Or they believed that the Christ only *appeared* to be on Jesus. In short, they did not believe in the incarnation, the God-man, Jesus Christ. Many cults can quickly be repudiated by this test (Stott, 111–112).

When the words confession and denial are used, public confession and denial are in view (Matt. 10:32–33; Jn. 12:42; Ro. 10:9–10). Confession refers to possessing the truth that Jesus was the Son of God and proclaiming it. We cannot have fellowship with the Father if we do not confess the Son (Stott, 112). Only the Son can reveal the Father to men (Matt. 11:27; Jn. 1:18; 12:44–45; 14:9) and only the Son can reconcile men to the Father (1 Jn. 2:1–2; Jn. 14:6; I Tim. 2:5; Stott, 112).

2:24 *As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*

2:25 *This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life.*

John draws attention to two safeguards that will protect the believers from being led astray—the word and the anointing (2:27).

They must let that which they heard from the beginning abide (remain) in them. What they had heard was the gospel, the apostolic message (1 Jn. 1:1–2). Christians who are always running after new teachers, listening to anyone and everyone, and never arriving at the knowledge of the truth is the characteristic of the last times (II Tim. 3:1, 7; 4:3). The Christian's strength lies not in his own efforts, but in the truth.

The result of such loyalty to the Son and the Father is the enjoyment of eternal life which God (or, Christ) promised us.

2:26 These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.

2:27 As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

The apostolic teaching (2:24) was not enough to keep them from going astray. The presence of the Holy Spirit is what makes the reality of the incarnation known to believers. He is the Spirit of truth (Jn. 15:26).

Verse 27 reflects a major shift from Old Covenant faith to New Covenant faith. The New Covenant is found in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31

29 “In those days they will not say again, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.’

Jeremiah 31:29 is a proverb found here and in Ezekiel (Ezek. 18:2). In order to understand this we need to realize that under the Old Covenant God dealt with people in a mediated or tribal fashion. Despite remnant themes and the emphasis on individual believers, the Old Testament pictures God working with His people as a tribal grouping whose knowledge of God and relations with God were uniquely dependent of specially endowed leaders. Thus, there was a strong emphasis on the Spirit being poured out upon prophets, priest, kings, and a few designated special leaders. When these leaders did what was right the whole community benefited. But when the king fell into sin he led all the people astray. Thus, if the priests, prophets, or kings ate sour grapes the children's teeth were set on edge; that is, if they went astray and sinned, the people suffered as well. But God says, “in those days”—in the days of restoration—people won't say that anymore. Instead, “everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge” (Jer. 29:30).

Jeremiah predicted that that tribal structure was going to change. Knowledge of God would reach each member of the covenant community from the least to the greatest. Furthermore, with the coming of the Spirit, there would be a universal distribution of the Spirit. All those under the new covenant would enjoy the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit is the agent that gives life and allows us to follow God's decrees and keep his laws. The Holy Spirit became a seal, down payment, and guarantee of the promised inheritance. This is much more than a renewed version of the old (Carson, Showing the Spirit, 151–156).

In Jeremiah 31:31–34 God says:

31 “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers (*that is, it won't be like the matter just discussed in the proverb; it won't be tribal*) . . ."

33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

34 "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Jeremiah 31:32 says that the new covenant is "not like the covenant I made with your forefathers." The reason it is not like that covenant is because under the new covenant all will know the Lord, all will have the law written in their hearts, and all will experience forgiveness of sin.

To have the law written on the heart is very close to the language of "circumcision of heart," which is nothing less than regeneration. This does not mean that no one in the Old Testament ever experienced regeneration; rather, it signals a change that is taking place in the nature of the entire covenant community. Instead of being a "mixed" entity, now the entire community will experience regeneration. Under the old economy not all Israel was Israel. There was a distinction between the physical and spiritual seed of Abraham. Under the Old Covenant both seeds received the covenant sign of circumcision and both were viewed as full covenant members in a national sense. However, only the spiritual seed of Abraham, the true Israel, would benefit in a salvific way. Under the new covenant there is no remnant.

Furthermore, the Lord would no longer remember sin. The new covenant is better because a more effective sacrifice has been offered. The Old Testament types and shadows are over.

These are the overtones that John is sighting. Under the New Covenant it will not be essentially tribal, under a mediated structure; rather, God says, "all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest." The idea is not that there are no teachers in the New Testament church. This is obvious since 1 John is almost completely didactic. This means that there are no mediating teachers that have an inside track with God that no one else has. Teachers under the New Covenant simply faithfully pass on what God has already said in His word. Even John refers his readers to the teaching they had heard before.

This is applicable to the historical situation that John was in for there were some who had become false teachers who had come to believe that they were a cut above the apostolic doctrine that had already been passed to the church. And the Christians that heard them felt threatened. John was reminding his readers that that was not the case.

Jesus had promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them in the truth.

- John 15:26–27: "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

- John 16:12–13: “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

Jeremiah tells us that under the New Covenant all believers would have the Holy Spirit guiding them. Thus, the Holy Spirit guided the disciples so that the message they delivered would be without error, and the indwelling Spirit confirms to us that the message is true.

The last part of verse 27 can be translated as (1) “just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (Christ),” or (2) “just as it has taught you, you abide in it (the word you have been taught).”

In short, the word is an objective safeguard and the anointing is a subjective experience, but both are necessary to continue in the truth. This is the Biblical balance seldom preserved by men. Some honor the word but neglect the Spirit who can interpret it, others honor the Spirit but neglect the word out of which He teaches. It is by these old possessions, not by new teachings that we will abide in the truth (Stott, 115).

In sum, in chapter 2 John has wrapped together obedience, doctrine, spiritual anointing, and love for the brothers as part of the same parcel.

2:28 Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Verse 28 forms both the end to this section and a transition to the next.