

# When 'Christians' Walk Away

*You Call Yourself a Christian*

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 2:19-21  
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Welcome again to Truth Community and I am very excited about what we have to say today because I think it's going to be clarifying for you in so many ways from the word of God. We all know and have sad experience with people who have professed to be Christians that we knew in our lives, sometimes having very prominent and significant roles in our spiritual development, who later turned out to abandon the faith; who gave up their pursuit of Christ and decided to go into a realm of sin and sometimes even died in that awful condition of rejection of Christ, and as we said last week, we've known men, far too many men who were preachers of the Gospel only to turn around and deny the faith and seek to destroy that for which they once stood. These are important issues for us to understand. What are we to make of the seeming departure of someone who claimed to know Christ and then walked with him for a while and then fell away and abandoned the faith?

Now, in some of the realms in which we have grown up and been taught, there would be an easy temptation to say, "Well, I remember when that young man prayed to receive Christ when he was just six years old and so I'm sure that he was a Christian all along." Beloved, that's not true. That's just not true at all. That is not the mark of what we look for to determine whether someone is a Christian or not and I realize how easy it is and how comforting it is, at one level, to think that that would be true because if that were true, then it would mean that there were no eternal consequences to having abandoned Christ in this life. It would mean that all came out well and they were in heaven in the end but, beloved, that's not true. That's just absolutely not true. Here's the issue. Turn in your Bibles to 1 John which is where we're at. Those of you that are visiting, we've been in the book of 1 John for a while and we'll be there for a while longer, but I want to point out something very simple and obvious to you that would show to you that that idea of looking back to a past prayer as proof of someone's salvation is an utterly false way to think about true salvation.

Look at chapter 5, verse 13, of 1 John. John says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." Now, I'm not going to take the time to read the entire book of 1 John, all 105 verses of it I think it is, in order to establish this point, but if it was so simple to prove that someone knows Christ, in order to have a assurance and since John wrote that we might

know that we would have eternal life, you would expect, if that prevalent view of proving salvation he prayed when he was a little boy, if that were true, somewhere in these five chapters you would find the Apostle John asking, "Have you prayed to receive Christ at some point in the past?" It's not there. There is nothing like that within the corners of a book specifically designed to tell us whether we have eternal life or not, to promote assurance. The Apostle John in writing to cultivate assurance in his audience does not tell them to look back at a past event. What he does do is he tells us to look for present signs of life. Present signs of life. Do you fear God? Do you love his word and seek to obey it? Do you love other Christians? Do you believe the truth about Christ? Those are the marks of a true Christian. It doesn't do any good to talk about a past prayer to receive Christ if there are no enduring marks of a true saving faith being manifested out in the life of a believer, and these things have such great consequences that as difficult as they are to hear, we need to deal with them head on and to deal with the reality of it.

You see, the consequence of this, and I really hadn't intended to get into this what I'm about to say, but the consequences of this that I've seen in past pastoral ministry is that there will be a family member who is like that: prayed to receive Christ, prayed some kind of prayer under the pressure or leading of a teacher or another family member or something like that, and prayed that and then there was never any manifestation of true spiritual life showing up in their life. And here's the issue, here's the issue that this is a serious test for our own allegiance in faithfulness to Christ is that because of our natural earthly affection for such a one we so desperately don't want them to be unsaved that we say they must be saved based on that past prayer and so we affirm them and say, "Well, they've just drifted from the Lord," or whatever. Beloved, that's not the loving thing to do. The loving thing to do for a person like that in your life is to bring them back and say, "You say you know Christ, there are no signs of life, of knowing Christ in your life." How can I look at a corpse, a spiritual corpse, as it were, and affirm that it is living when there is no love for Christ, no love for his word, no desire for God's people? How could that possibly be the mark of someone who has been born again from the powerful work of the Holy Spirit from above? It just can't be. If it was all about a past prayer, you'd find it somewhere in the book of 1 John and it's not there. Read it for yourself and you'll see that that is true.

Well, the question then is: what are we to make of these people? How are we to understand their condition? Well, this is very helpful from our text here in 1 John 2:19-21 and look at that text with me. That's where we'll be this morning, 1 John 2:19. The Apostle John referring to the false teachers that had troubled the midst of his readers in times past says this,

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

How are we to explain this problem of spiritual defection which is going to no doubt just continue to grow worse and worse as the days go on? Well, I want to give you two points from this passage to help you think through this. Point 1 here is: the explanation of spiritual defection. How do we explain it? How do we explain that someone was with us for a while and then went out? And when I say "with us" I'm not talking about our local body here, I'm talking about someone who claimed to identify with Christ, claimed to be a Christian, and then their life just went off the rails and there was no love for Christ to be manifested ever since. How do we explain that? That's point 1, the explanation of spiritual defection and here's the simple answer to the question: those people the Bible teaches, the Bible teaches that people who make a deliberate and final departure from Christianity were never really saved to begin with. They were never really saved to begin with.

Look at verse 19 with me again. The Apostle John says, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who is the one who brings salvation to men and so since we are reading from the book inspired by the Holy Spirit about the work of salvation that Christ accomplished, we're getting it straight from the source who really knows the situation, right? 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." Beloved, here's the way that you must understand that situation: their departure shows that they never were saved to begin with. Their departure reveals their true character. It reveals what was true all along about them. They were of us meaning they seemed to belong to the body of Christ, they seemed to belong to us, they seemed to be one of us for a time and they were but only in outward identification, only in external association. When they left the true body of Christ, they were showing that they did not truly belong with us in spirit and in life; that the inner reality was absent even though the external appearance was there. That is what the Scripture teaches.

We see from this that there is a distinction between the visible church and the invisible church. The visible church, those who gather together, those who identify themselves with Christ, those who would claim the name of Christ, not everyone who does that is truly a believer on the inside. That's what this means and the sad difficult reality for us as believers, as true believers in Christ is, is that there are going to be people in our lives that we love, that we trusted, that we were sure they were in Christ, but there's going to be this experience of them walking away and proving that we didn't know them like we thought we did and our duty before Christ in that situation is not to try to call someone a Christian who obviously wasn't and isn't. Our duty is to be faithful to his word and to see and understand the situation like the Scripture explains it to us. They went out from us but they weren't really of us.

How could John say that? How can we know that that is true? Well, the Bible teaches a doctrine that's known as the perseverance of the saints. It's a doctrine which means that God once he has saved a believer, he will secure that believer and keep him in the faith until the end. You've got to understand this, that when you were saved, you were not saved by the power of your own decision to trust Christ. No one was saved by the power of their own decision. The power that saves us, Romans 1:16, it's the power of God unto

salvation. It is God coming down and opening a heart and drawing him to Christ and baptizing him, as it were, into the body of Christ in a relationship, a spiritual relationship of union with Christ that can never be changed, that can never be altered. The Bible says that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable and so the power of God is at work and if the power of God is at work in salvation, God finishes what he starts. God does what he sets out to do.

Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Philippians, just back to the left probably 10, 15 pages for you unless you've got bad eyesight and a large print and then it might be 20 or 25, that's okay, but this is so very important for us to understand this. Philippians 1:6 says, "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." Look at chapter 2, verse 13, "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." God starts the work, God is at work in the work, God finishes the work so when somebody is truly saved, they have truly been born from above. The power of God guarantees that whatever difficulties and trials and temptations they may go through, whatever manifestations of weakness there might be in their spiritual life from time to time, underlying that is the current of God's power that is certainly carrying them to persevere until the end and that those who God saves will ultimately persevere until the end. It is a divine unseen reality that guarantees that true believers will ultimately continue in the faith. That is because of the nature of salvation that we believe this.

Look, we're not saying, we know from personal experience in our own lives that we are not living perfect spiritual lives; we're not the perfect witnesses for Christ that we would like to be; we're not the sinless people that we would like to be, you know that in your own heart. You're not manifesting perfection and so that's not what we're talking about at all. True believers will struggle, they may be sorely tried, they may fall into sin, but at the end of the day they will never finally, completely, deliberately turn away from Christ and renounce him as if they had never known him. True believers don't do that and they could not do that because God has saved them and brought them into his family, into the body of Christ and God has saved them and secured them and given them a new nature with new desires and a new spirit is at work in them that guarantees that that final turning away will not happen for those that have truly been born again.

Look at the Gospel of John 10:27. Don't you love the Scriptures? I do. I love the clarity of God's word and one thing that I've been thinking about recently is this, this is a total tangent and side note but I have a certain quota of tangents that I can go off in each message, a number known only to me. When you encounter trials that weaken you, when you encounter trials that really weigh on you and they force you back to the Scriptures, they make you come back to the Scriptures to find clarity and hope and encouragement and strength, thank God for those trials because whatever God uses in your life that draws you back to the word of God is a gift from him whether it's a church service on Sunday morning or the refreshment of hearing something on Christian radio or a trial that forces you back the word of God, whatever draws you back to the word of God, thank him for that because that is a gift from God to you to bring you back into his mind as he has expressed it in the Scriptures. End of tangent.

John 10:27. We're saying that true Christians persevere because God finishes what he starts. Look at verse 27, Jesus is speaking here and he says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Look at that, he states that as an indicative, "My sheep follow Me." Do you get that? Jesus says, "My sheep follow Me." They don't turn around and follow someone else in the end. "My sheep follow Me," Jesus says. Someone who is not following Christ has no grounds for assurance of salvation rooted in something that they did in the past that has no enduring reality flowing from it in their present life. This is so basic and so important. Verse 28, he says, "I give eternal life to them." Eternal life, not temporary life that will be, you know, resurrected later. This is eternal enduring life, "and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 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. I and the Father are one."

With that in mind, turn to the book of Romans 8, beginning in verse 35, a familiar passage, I know, but speaking to the enduring eternal reality of true salvation. The Apostle Paul says, echoing the same theme from Jesus in John 10, says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.' But in all these things we," the true Christians, "we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God secures us. He saves us. He keeps us in Christ. He most certainly keeps true Christians in the faith.

Now, with that little bit of background, turn back to 1 John 2:19. So when John 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," he's simply saying that their departure unmasked what was always true. A true Christian doesn't depart from the faith ultimately, finally in the end. So we're not to think of those kind of people as those who lost their salvation as if the work of God could be reversed; that as if the work of God could be overturned by a subsequent human decision. You know, when you think about salvation as simply being a decision that you make at a point in time, it's easy to fall into the mindset that you could reverse it with a subsequent decision in a point of time but that's not what the Bible teaches about the nature of salvation at all. Salvation is being born again from above by the power of the Spirit who gives you a new heart, a new nature and continues that work until the end. When you separate out the work of God from your view of salvation and turn it into a simplistic decision at a point in time, that's what opens you up to think that, okay, you can go in and out and then you just baptize it with a false view of eternal security that says one prayer, one time secures everything forever, without ever calculating the possibility that that prayer was not an actual moment of salvation but something else; something done under the influence or pressure of the moment; something done under the pressure of just wanting the 17th verse of "Just as I am" to

finally come to an end. "Okay, just stop the music because I can't take it anymore. I give in." These are people that never had salvation to begin with.

Now, let me illustrate this for you again from the Scriptures. Let me back up. To say these things with this kind of clarity is not to say that individual circumstances are not very difficult to discern. We're trying to understand the principle before we work out the application. Understand this: the 12 disciples of Jesus had the very same problem with this issue and were shocked with the ramifications of this issue while Jesus was with them on the earth. You may remember from reading the Gospels that the disciples had been with Jesus for a period of about three years, moving about with him, interacting with him together collectively as a group, hearing his teaching, seeing the miracles and ministering, sometimes being sent out by him in order to minister together. So these men were intimately working together with one another all seemingly in the cause of a common Master and a common commitment to him. You know what happened with one of them but let's go back to the Gospel of John 13 so that we can see it in the text for ourselves. John 13, Jesus is at the Last Supper with the 12 disciples at this point. John 13 and I'll assume your familiarity with the story. John 13, we'll pick it up in verse 21. Jesus is at the table with the men and it says in verse 21, "When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.'" This is unthinkable. Look at verse 22, "The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking." Now, you and I have the benefit of knowing how the story comes out. You and I know that the one who betrayed him was Judas Iscariot, that wretch of a man who betrayed the Lord with a kiss in the garden of Gethsemane and betrayed him over to the Roman authorities who would crucify him. You and I know that now in retrospect but at the time, here's my point, at the time, the disciples had no idea. They had no idea. None of them looked and said, "Yeah, you know, it's Judas. We knew, right? We talked about this. It was Judas. I had my eye on him for a long time." It wasn't like that at all. They had no idea. This was a total shock to them that Judas would betray Christ. They thought of him as nothing other than another faithful disciple in their midst but he was a devil. He was a devil in their midst. Now, and you know what happened as Jesus sent him out and he went out to betray him.

Now, last time we said in verse 18 in 1 John 2, go back there with me. 1 John 2 in verse 18, the Scriptures tell us to expect false teachers and spiritual defection. Verse 18, he says, "Children," 1 John 2:18, he 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." Even with an apostle still on the earth, there were many antichrists, false teachers, false prophets circulating about in the church, not always easy to recognize and identify. So the Bible tells us to expect this as part of the age in which we live; that there will be spiritual imposters around us and so when they are exposed as spiritual imposters, we expect that and we're not thrown off by it, we are not confused by it, and here in verse 19, John explains how we are to think about it in his pastoral desire to help us achieve spiritual victory in the midst of a hostile world. Listen, the fact that this is difficult and the fact that this is painful to think about because faces come to your mind about what this means for loved ones that you have in the past or in the present, is no reason to reject the clear teaching of Scripture. God gives us this for our benefit and for

our up-building and he wants you to understand what it is. Their departure only showed the pre-existing unbelief that always reigned in their hearts. It is very sad, it is very sobering but that is what the Scriptures teach us. The thing that we have to come back to is that while they may have fooled us, we may have been fooled, Christ never was. Christ knows those who belong to him. Christ knows his sheep and so our Lord never lost track of anyone; he was never confused about how this was going to come out. And the fact that our knowledge is imperfect and we can't see hearts simply means that we're in a broken place of dependence before the Lord as he works out his plan for the church.

Now, here's the question: why does God allow that? Why is it that God would allow this to occur, for imposters to be in the midst for a while and then they would go out? It's so painful on a personal level. On a pastoral level, I'll tell you, it's really painful to see people in your flock that just leave and abandon the faith. Nothing breaks a pastor's heart like that does. When Christians die, there's an element of sadness to that but, you know, you have the hope of heaven to fall back on, to rejoice in even in the temporary separation, but when someone walks away after pleas to come back and they say, "I don't want this anymore. Leave me alone." Sometimes spiritual life comes with its thorns. It's not always joy and comfort and peace in every situation that we deal with either as a pastor or as Christians together in the body of Christ.

Why does God allow this if it's going to cause so much confusion and pain? John says right in 1 John 2:19, look at it with me, he says, "if they had been of us, they would have remained with us," okay, "but they went out, so that," do you see those little two words there? So that, for this purpose. Here's what God was doing as this unfolded. "So that it would be shown that they all are not of us." This teaches us so much that is so important. Stated simply, God purposed their departure in order to clarify the truth about Christ. In the particular setting in which John was writing there, false teachers had been mingled together with the true believers, they are mingled together and it's hard to tell one from the other but these false teachers went out and do you know what they took with them when they went out? I'll tell you then since no one seems to know: what they took with them was they took their false teaching with them. They took their spiritual hypocrisy with them. They took their false love and their hypocrisy and hatred for true believers, they took that all out with them and what did they leave behind? They left behind a purified church. Do you get that? The tares had been removed from the wheat. The church had been purified when those false teachers left. It was shown that what they represented, what they taught, their lifestyle was not a representation of the true spiritual life of being in union with Jesus Christ and by separating out as they left the true bodies, it had a purifying sanctifying impact on the church they left behind. And what does that teach you? Something really important, is that more than what happens with particular individuals, God values the purity of his church. God values the clarity of the Gospel. God values the protection of his people. And beloved, what we're saying here is that when it comes to our deepest allegiances of our heart, we love these friends, we love these family members, we pray for them, we want them to come to Christ, we're not opposed to them but we have even deeper allegiances to the Lord of our souls. We have even deeper allegiances to the Lord of the church. We have even deeper allegiances to the

truth of Scripture and it's simply aligning ourselves with what God himself considers most valuable.

The church is purified when false brethren leave. It broke my heart when I saw people leave from my prior flock, leaving in a cloud of sin and unrepentant about it. You know, your soul just melts and weeps over that. There is no triumph in that. The triumph is when people like you are faithful to Christ and live for Christ faithfully day by day, week by week, resisting sin, being faithful to the Scriptures, not trivializing, not flirting with sin in your life. That's the triumph and joy but when these other things happen, we have to recognize that God has purposed that to happen from time to time so that the truth would be more clear than it was before. What they meant for evil in their denial of Christ, God worked for good in order to build up his people and to clarify truth from error. Think about it as somebody having a really deadly contagious disease in the midst simply being lifted up and pulled out. That's not an act of unkindness by God, that is an act of mercy from God to his church to remove influences like that so that they don't infect the spiritual life of those who are true believers and left behind. Their hypocrisy and their false teaching leave with them when that happens and for that, we see the greater purposes of good that God has at work and being played out in our eyes.

It's sobering, isn't it? There is a humbling effect to this. You say, "Wow, there's a lot at stake here when people gather together for truth. There's a lot at stake when the Gospel is explained. There is a lot at stake when the Bible is opened up." It's kind of a heavy theme, I realize that but do you understand something? The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and these are fearful things that we're talking about. When we talk about the Gospel, when we talk about Jesus Christ, when we talk about the realities of sin and death and hell and repentance unto eternal life, we're talking about things of eternal consequence. We're not playing games when we come to the Scripture and so, yes, there is a fearful sanctifying effect that it should have on us to say these things matter; God is holy and his truth will not be trifled with. And it humbles us before the word of God and causes us to cling all the more to Christ and to be all the more purified and faithful to truth because we don't want to stray into that realm which calls for his discipline and judgment and that sanctifying effect is not something to be denied. It's cleansing. It's helpful. Fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and realizing that these issues are real has an impact. And as a preacher of the word of God, it really has an impact on you because you are no longer willing to simply say vaguely comforting, loving things about God without warning people about the spiritual risks that are at hand. A pastor who warns you about these risks is merely pleading with you to consider the well-being of your soul and the well-being of the souls that are around you.

You say, "Well, what do I do if I see somebody like that? There's somebody like that in my life." Well, listen, listen, the last thing that you want to do is tell them, "It will be okay. You're a Christian. I remember when you prayed." That is not being faithful to Christ and it's not being loving to them. The thing that you say to them is, "God is holy and he says that we must be holy for he is holy and if there is no holiness in your life, on what possible grounds do you think you might be a believer in Christ?" And you have to confront them with the truth in the possibility that God might use that confrontation to



pierce their heart and bring them to repentance. That's the only loving thing to do. If someone is blindfolded in their self-deception and you realize that, if you don't go and untie the blindfold and do whatever you can to get that off of their eyes, that's where our call is, is to help people see and understand; to be a spiritual mirror to them, as it were. And that doesn't mean that we are angry, it means that we plead with them as from a broken heart.

Well, second point here this morning. When you see spiritual defection, what should you think about yourself? How should you respond yourself when you see this taking place? That brings us to point 2, what I'll call: the examination from spiritual defection. The examination from spiritual defection. We kind of hit the most difficult point and now we're going to bounce back up into the joy of being a Christian here. This is always the treatment that Scripture gives: when it gives us difficult things, it brings light alongside of it; it brings encouragement to true believers and John the apostle was no exception here in chapter 2. Notice how he pivots. He was talking about the false teachers in verses 18 and 19, now he is pivoting in verse 20 to address the true Christians once again and these are sweet, wonderful words for those of us who truly know Christ.

He says 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." Do you see what John is doing here? He's dealt with the issue of those who walk away but now he turns his attention back to true believers and he doesn't threaten them. He doesn't frighten them, rather he affirms them and says, he makes it clear he's making a contrast. Look at verse 20, he says, "but. I've been talking about these people but now I'm going to talk about you, and what do I know to be true about you?" Verse 20, "you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know." He says, "I know that the Spirit of God resides in you. While I have dealt with spiritual defectors, I don't see you in that light. I know that you have the Holy Spirit within you. How do I know? I know because I see the marks of spiritual life in you. I see that you fear God. I see that," in verse 3, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. I see that you love the word of God; that you seek and pursue to obey it and to conform your life to it and to defend it and be true to it. I see," verse 10, chapter 2, verse 10, "I see that you love the brethren. I see," in verse 24, "that what abides in you is what you heard from the beginning. I see all the marks of spiritual life in you and so as I talk about spiritual defectors, I'm not wielding a club over your head," he says to his readers, "I want you to understand that I know that you have the Holy Spirit abiding in you and that you are a true believer in Christ. So don't misunderstand my clarity about defectors as though I'm giving you something that would make you think that I'm questioning your salvation," is what he says to his readers there. Verse 21, he says, "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. I'm writing these things to you because you do know the truth and I'm just advancing your knowledge and understanding a little bit further."

Now, how can we take this and apply it personally in the midst of everything that we've been saying here? What should you be thinking? How can I think about this in terms of

my own personal spiritual life? How do I respond when I see that? Well, listen, when others depart from the faith, what you do is you step back and examine what God has given to you. Christ has set you apart. Christ has given you his Holy Spirit. You have the marks, if you examine yourself and see these things and know them to be true, you have the marks of true spiritual life in you: a love for the word of God, a love for Christ, a faithfulness to him, a love for his people. John says, "I'm calling you back here to remember that you have the Holy Spirit. You know the truth." So what you think, the way that you think about this as a believer is that you have this truth, you have true salvation in you so therefore your renewed commitment is, "I have true salvation. I am not going to abandon it no matter what anyone else does. If the world is against Christ, then I'm against the world. If the whole world walks away from Christ," you say to yourself, "I'm not going to. I'm going to be faithful to Christ. I'm going to stay with Christ no matter who leaves around me," and their departure becomes a pivot point for you to deepen your own commitment to Christ. You're not intimidated when false teachers or pastors fall into sin. You think about it this way, you say, "So what if that man, that woman, has drunk from the fountain of Judas? So what if he has walked away? So what if he has been unfaithful to Christ? I'm not going there. I'm not going to be intimidated by that." And what you need to understand especially when you're dealing with false teachers who have turned away, men maybe that you used to trust and now are not following Christ, their teaching doesn't show that you're ignorant, it shows that they are liars and you have all the spiritual resources that you need at your disposal in the Scripture. Nothing has changed just because somebody else veers off path. That doesn't mean that you need to. It's not a threat to you at all. It's simply an occasion for you to say, "Lord, you'll find me faithful until the end and I'm trusting you to keep me and help me on that path along the way." So when people walk away, it's simply an opportunity for you to examine your own life.

Look back at the Gospel of John 6. We're almost done here. John 6, let's look at verse 64, let's say, or verse 63. Jesus has a crowd around him teaching and he's echoing the themes that we've been talking about here this morning. He says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." So he says the Spirit of God is the one who gives spiritual life. It doesn't come from a decision that we've made. Look at this in verse 64, in the midst of this group of people listening to his teaching, he says, "there are some of you who do not believe." Christ dealt with that issue in his own ministry. It's not a surprise that we deal with it in ours. "For Jesus knew," verse 64, "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.'" Hard teaching. "Some of you don't believe. You can't come to me unless the Father grants it to you. Understand that the power of salvation is not resident in your own hands," is what he's saying, and that teaching was no more popular 2,000 years ago than it is today.

Look at verse 66, "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." Spiritual defection once again in the ministry and life of Jesus Christ. If it happened to Christ when he's teaching, it's no surprise that it's going to

happen to us sometimes in our ministry, but it's not a sign, when I say "our" I'm talking collectively not me, it's not a sign that we're doing anything wrong. This is what happens when truth is clearly declared, people leave. They don't like it. Some men will follow you up to a point but as soon as you tell them something they don't like on something that really matters, they're out of here. And we're talking about this in terms of the message of Christ, not a particular pastor or anything like that.

These people were confronted with hard teaching from Christ and they bolted and what does Jesus do in verse 67? This is what I say about the examination that comes when you see spiritual defection, it's an opportunity to renew your own commitment to Christ. Verse 67, "Jesus said to the twelve, 'You do not want to go away also, do you?'" It's a question. He's inviting them to say no to that question in the original language. He's expecting them to say no. This isn't, Jesus isn't asking for information here, "What are you guys going to do now? I wonder? I wonder?" No, he's telling them, it's as if he's saying, "You're not going to go away, are you?" and the answer is, "No, I'm not."

Look at what Peter said and here is where it gets so helpful to you spiritually. This is a magnificently important verse to come back to again and again in your own spiritual life, to clarify in your mind, to clarify in the commitment of your will, to clarify once and for all again and again if that even makes any sense. I don't know, to say to do it once for all and then to do it again and again, but you know what I'm saying. You come back to this important point over and over again to show to your own heart the utter impossibility of you walking away from Christ. It's unthinkable. It was unthinkable to Peter and here's why it's so unthinkable, Peter said to him in verse 68, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life." Feel the power of that statement, "Lord, Lord, I have no alternatives. If I left you, where would I go? What kind of darkness is my alternative? The pleasures of the world, that leads to damnation. Another teacher, another religion? No, you said that you're the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through you. There is salvation in no one else. There is no other name given among heaven by which we must be saved. Lord, I have no alternatives. I am helplessly dependent upon you," is what you say when you see spiritual defection occur. It's the commitment of your heart and you look around and, you know, there were thousands of people walking off into the desert sunset at this particular point in time. This great room of Legacy Hall would have been filled to overflowing with them and now it's down to a circle of 12, so vast was the defection at this point in Jesus' ministry. And Peter looks at them, their sandals fading into the distance, and he looks back into the face of Christ and says, "Lord, I have no other options. Not only can I not go anywhere, I don't want to go anywhere else. Where would I go?" Spiritual defection for you when you see it happen becomes a clarifying point that reminds you of the exclusivity of Christ and your complete trust and submission to him. Peter says in verse 69, "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." And every instance of spiritual defection simply becomes a means for you to reaffirm that in your own heart.

Turn to 2 Timothy 3:12, it's just before third Timothy if you're still looking for it in your Bible. The Apostle Paul said, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." The Christian life is going to be tough from time to time for us, beloved, and

look at verse 13, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." You know, if you look around us and you say, "Man, there just seems to be an acceleration of impostors and false teaching and it's just getting so difficult to be a faithful Christian in the midst of it," take heart. Be encouraged. This is what was to be expected. The Bible told us to expect this. What do you do then when people with more degrees after their name are leaving and you're left behind and we're just here as ordinary Christians together? What do we do in response when they bring their intimidation and call themselves Dr. and say, "This is all false. It's all a fable"? What do you do? It's not hard. Verse 14, "You, however, continue in the things that you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them." Just continue on doing what you're doing. Just continue on being faithful in the Scriptures, faithful to Christ, faithful to obey him and the Lord will bless you in that realm right there. There is no cause for fear. There is no cause for alarm. Just keep on following Christ faithfully and remember, verse 15, "that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

So you can picture it this way: you're following Christ and then you see a lot of people defect, what do you do? You keep following Christ. You just keep on doing that which God has shown to your heart to be true. You stay faithful to the Scriptures which God has shown you to be true. You stay faithful to the Christ who changed your life and redeemed your soul from sin and cleaned your conscience and gave you an assurance and a hope of heaven. You just keep on going where you're going, keep doing what you're doing. The fact that people defect doesn't change anything for us. We'll just keep being faithful, keep honoring Christ, loving, worshiping him and devoting ourselves to his word. There's a simple, glorious joy in that and I trust that you see it.

Bow with me in prayer.

*Father, we're so grateful to you and we just, there is just so much to pray in response to this. Father, give us grace to do just that. Give us grace to follow you even when others walk away. Help us to go forth and rise and be faithful. Father, for those in the room here that maybe have been trying to live with one foot in the world and one foot in Christ, Father, help them to see that this message is the time to put away the hypocrisy and to repent and to ask you and to plead with you to forgive them and to cleanse them. Father, help them to see that their willingness to flirt with sin is not consistent with a claim to know the holy God of the Bible. Help them to repent and then trust themselves to Christ.*

*Father, for those that are here that are convicted and feel the sense, "I have never been a Christian at all," Father, bring to their hearts the good news that Christ came to save sinners. Father, show them that you will forgive all of their sins and all of their hypocrisy if they'll simply turn to Christ, receive him and repent. Yes, Father, our Lord Jesus shed his blood for the salvation of sinners and if those are here today that feel conviction, help them to see that the invitation is for them to come to Christ today.*

*And Father, for those of us that see the work of your Spirit in our hearts through no boasting or pride of our own but we know, Lord, by the testimony of your Spirit in our*

*hearts, by the work that you have done in our lives, we know that we belong to you, Father, for that gift, we give you great thanks and praise. We thank you for the assurance, the certainty based on your word, the certainty based on the blood and righteousness of Christ that you will finish what you have begun in our lives. You won't let a sheep stray out of the fold and not bring him back. You won't let us fall away. You won't let us fall into hell at the end, Lord. No, you love us too much for that. You paid too high a price to let that happen, that one of your sheep would fall away after you had already secured them with your own blood. Father, in that we remember that we are greatly blessed, that we have a position of great security and we lived this life from a position of strength. We thank you for that. We ask you to finish the work that you have begun in our lives and help us, dear Lord, as the world gets increasingly deceitful and sinful around us, help that to be the impetus to us to be all the more sanctified and faithful to you. Lord, make our testimony stand out as a light in a dark place. Father, make this gathering, this assembly, this fellowship of believers be a light to many. Let our lives be that way. Let our corporate life be that way, Father, wholly, totally, completely sanctified as a testimony to you. If you grant us that, we'll have all that we care about. And Father, we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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