

A Test of Separation from False Teaching

1 John 2:18-29

1 John 2:18-27 - *“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 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.²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. ²¹ I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. ²² Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.²³ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. 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. ²⁶ These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. ²⁷ But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”*

Background Notes

Everyone who claims to be a Christian is not necessarily a true believer. Some people who call themselves “Christians” even deny that Jesus is God! That’s true today, and it was true when the apostle John wrote this epistle in the 1st century.

The particular brand of false teaching in John’s day was a heresy that later became known as “Gnosticism” in the 2nd century AD. Among other things, Gnosticism denied the full deity of Jesus Christ. That’s why present-day cults that deny the deity of Christ are sometimes called “modern day Gnostics.” The apostle John was very concerned to warn his readers, especially those who were young in the faith, about the dangers of this false teaching.

Back in verses 13-14, John divided the Christian family into three different spiritual maturity groupings: fathers, young men, and children, or “babies in Christ.” These categories included both male and female believers.

The “young men” category of believers was specifically addressed in verses 15-17. Starting at the end of verse 14: *“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. 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.”*

The “young men” category includes both young men and young women. These young Christians are especially vulnerable to enemy’s attacks when he uses the temptations of the “world system.” Thus the apostle warned the “young men” category of believers about the world system in verses 15-17, and commanded separation from it. In fact, separation from the world is a test of Christian fellowship.

Another “separation test” is found in the last section of chapter 2. It is the test of **separation from false teaching**. This is especially aimed at the “children” – the “babies in Christ,” or new believers. The word for “children” in verse 18 is the same word as John used in verse 13, and it is a reference to new believers. It is not the same word for “children” that John used in verse 1 and verse 12. In the rest of the epistle that word for “children” was used to refer to everyone who has been born into the family of God.

The word “children” in verses 13 and 18 refers to new believers. They were most vulnerable to false teaching because they were not yet mature in the faith. This is still true today. New Christians are vulnerable to being confused by false teaching, because they haven’t had time to learn much Scripture.

The term “babies in Christ” does not imply that new Christians can’t be spiritual. They certainly can be spiritual! In fact, a new believer can be more spiritual than many older believers who are simply coasting in their Christian lives. Remember to distinguish between **spirituality** and **spiritual maturity**. Spirituality has to do with our love and devotion to the Lord. Spiritual maturity has to do with our knowledge of the Word.

Babies in Christ are not spiritually mature, even though they may be spiritual. Babies in Christ don’t yet know the Word of God very well, so they’re more easily deceived by false teaching. In fact the enemy targets babies in Christ with false teaching. That’s why the apostle John specifically addressed new believers this section about false teaching

Doctrinal Point

Separation from false teaching is a test of Christian fellowship.

Verses 24-25: *“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. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.”*

Separation from false teaching is a test of Christian fellowship. In fact, if the core teaching of our Lord and His apostles does not abide in you, it is evidence that you are not part of the Christian fellowship - and that you don’t have eternal life. This was true of the Gnostic false teachers and those who followed their false teachings. Look again at verse 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.”*

Let's divide our doctrinal point about separation from false teaching into two sub-points:

a. The reality of false teaching.

In verse 18 John taught that they were facing this false teaching because they were already in the "last days." *"Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour."* Remember, John wrote this letter near the end of the 1st century. His readers knew from the Gospels, and from the epistles of Paul and Peter (that had already been written), that false teaching would characterize the last days.

The "last days" began with the coming of Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son."* So the last days actually began with the coming of Christ. But the last days will continue to get worse and worse. 2 Timothy 3:1: *"But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come,"* and 2 Timothy 3:13: *"But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."*

The prophetic scriptures teach us that a person known as the "antichrist" will come in the final last days. Here, however, John said that already many antichrists (false teachers who deny that Jesus is the Christ) have come (v18). A denial of the deity of Christ is really the core of satanic false teaching: *"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also"* (v22-23).

Notice that the core of false teaching is not a denial of Christ as an historical person or as a good man. False teachers, both then and today, admit those facts. They even preach it. The core of false teaching is the denial of the full deity of Christ, and a denial that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior.

On the authority of this Scripture, any religion that says that Jesus was only a good man, or that He is only one of many ways of salvation is a false religion. That kind of false teaching was present in John's day and it's a reality today. Most people today will acknowledge that Jesus was a good man, but many of them would not acknowledge that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

b. The restraint of false teaching.

How do we protect ourselves from false teaching? We are protected by holy Scripture (v24-25) and by the Holy Spirit (v6-27). *"That which they have heard from the beginning"* (v24) – that was the doctrine or teaching of the apostles. If these early Christians would abide in the Scripture, they would be abiding in the Son and in the Father - and they would be protected from false teaching.

This is also true for us today. To be protected from false teaching, we need to know and abide in the Word of God. Abiding in the Word means more than just a five-minute devotional reading of the Bible each day. For protection from the satanic attack of false teaching, we need to carefully read the Word, meditate on the Word and obey the Word.

Believers also have the Holy Spirit for protection. He is the “anointing” mentioned in verses 20 and 27. The Holy Spirit teaches us by applying the Word of God to our hearts and in our lives. Thus He protects us from false teaching.

Verse 27 says, “*you do not need that anyone teach you.*” Does this verse contradict Ephesians 4:11, which says that the Lord gave teachers to the Church? No! The idea here is that we do not need any teaching other than what is in the Word of God. The false teachers (then and today) always push so-called “***additional truth.***” Remember - any teaching that is “additional” to the teaching found in God’s Word is false teaching. All we really need is the Word of God in our hands and the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

So separation from false teaching is a test of Christian fellowship.

Practical Application

Let’s be ashamed to be ashamed.

Verses 28-29: “*And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.*”

Is verse 28 a reference to unbelievers who will be ashamed before the Lord when He comes to judge them? Or is it speaking of believers at the judgment seat of Christ who have not served the Lord faithfully? Both positions can be found in the various commentaries on this epistle.

However, the ***context*** of this verse indicates that this message was written to ***believers***. There will be reward at the judgment seat of Christ for faithful believers – but there will be loss of reward for believers who have not been faithful servants in this life.