

The Church 1 John 2:19

Introduction

The church all over America is shrinking. Many denominations have gone liberal. Members are leaving the churches and not coming back. Doom and gloom for the church. It sounds like a problem that has recently appeared, but in reality, this was a problem that the church that John writes to also faced. He writes to them because many people have left, and the members were confused as to what teachings were correct. They followed the apostles' teaching, and as a result, the false teachers left. Why? Today we will look at the nature of the church and why people leave and why believers stay.

I. The visible church

- The church that the world sees

Illustration: Buildings, denominations, people

Note: What you see when you drive by a church. You do not know if the church is liberal or conservative. You cannot tell from the way people enter the church either. The only way you can tell is how the Bible is taught—as an errant Word of God or as stories that have good morals.

- “they went out from us”
 - The invisible and visible church
 - Believers and unbelievers

Illustration: Wheat and tare

Matthew 13:24-30 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; (25) but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. (26) But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. (27) So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' (28) He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' (29) But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

Note 1: This should not come as a surprise that unbelievers are in church. The Devil will try to infiltrate the church and cause it to fail, create confusion, and lead people astray.

Note 2: Jesus explained this parable and said that the land = world. The point is that sometimes it is impossible to distinguish an unbeliever and a believer. Young wheat and tares look like until the wheat ripens—in this case, both look different mature. If pull out the tares, it would also be pulling out the young wheat because of how much they look alike. So when we pull out young believers, we are in effect telling them that they are unbelievers. We are not to decide who is who (unless they commit sins and are unrepentant). Hence the confusion from the church that John writes to. They were probably saying, “They were baptized in our church, sang with us, had Lord’s Supper with us, and then they leave.” Sometimes unbelievers look like believers, and sometimes believers look like unbelievers.

Transition: John implies here that many of the people left and did not come back. They were led by false teachers (many of them antichrists). Because they were deceived by the false teachings, they were exposed as not being part of the church. They were apostates.

II. Apostasy

- Means leaving or abandoning the faith

Note: This does not mean that Christians can lose their salvation, but they were those who profess to be Christians, but they did not belong to Christ in the first place.

- Why did they leave?
 - God unmasked them

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (10) and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (11) And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, (12) that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

John 15:2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Note: God does this to clean out the church and to protect it from false doctrines and teaching. He will allow the false teachers to come in and draw those who are not believers to follow the false teachers (or as John calls them, antichrist). This is the same thing as God removing the dead branches from the vine and winnowing the chaff from the wheat.

- They followed their evil desires

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; (4) and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

- Circumstances

Matthew 13:3-7 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. (4) And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. (5) Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. (6) But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. (7) And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. **Matthew 13:18-22** "Therefore hear the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. (20) But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. (22) Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

Transition: The unbelievers deny the humanity and/or divinity of Jesus the Christ. They were never part of the church because they did not belong to Christ. They were temporary in the visible church. However, those who have remained (affirmed the teaching of the apostles) are part of the invisible church. Therefore the focus is not on those who had left, but on "us".

III. The invisible church

- Body of Christ—completely of true believers (**John 10:16**)

Note: John uses the word "us" five times—emphasizing the relationship that we have with each other and in Christ.

- Belonging to Christ
 - Holy Spirit anointed on us (v 20)
 - By faith—know the truth (v 21)

Illustration: Peter's declaration of faith

Matthew 16:13-18 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (14) So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (15) He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (16) Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (17) Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. (18) And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Note: It is who Jesus is that is the rock which the church is built on. It is by faith in Him and knowing Him that we are strong. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. It is both the invisible church and on the individual. They both endure. This is the concept of perseverance of the saints.

- Perseverance of the saints
 - Would have remained with us

- **Note:** Perseverance of the saints means that those who are saved will endure to the end (*Matthew 24:13 But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*). But it also means that God preserves His people to the end by His power (*Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*). Salvation is always of the Lord (**Note:** ESV—“would have continued with us” which is implied that if their hearts had been regenerate, then they would have continued in the teaching of the apostles and in the church of believers. They would have stayed to the end because of their relationship to Christ. As Jesus said in **John 10**, His sheep hear His voice and know Him and follow Him. His sheep stay with Him. No matter what hell does to the individuals of the invisible church, they will not prevail. We are safe in the Master’s hands.

Conclusion

John is not concerned about the numbers in the church—as seen from his comments about the defection. He seems to be saying, “Yes, people have left you—don’t be surprised. Understand that this will happen because there many antichrists in the world that will come in and try to deceive you, and many people will believe their words and leave the church. When that happens, their deeds expose them that they are not Christians. There’s nothing you have done to cause this except for your stand for the truth.” John was not interested in numbers or unity for the sake of unity—but in doctrinal purity as he expounds later in the same chapter who Christ is and how they are to hold to that doctrine. The more they teach that doctrine of Christ as the apostles taught, the more it will shine upon false teaching and expose it. The false teachers cannot stand the truth and will leave the church. In a way, when churches experiences mass exodus of people when teaching the truth and they never come back, then that church has made its stand that is pleasing to the Lord—preaching the truth as Jesus has commanded, and He will bless the church.