

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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From Us But Not Of Us

(Jerry Fite)

Were the many “*antichrists*” in the days of John apostatizing Christians (*I Jn. 2:18*)? Had they once been in the truth, and had now departed from the truth with their false teaching? Some say yes, by what John writes next. Others say no, because of what John reveals next. Which interpretation is accurate?

John writes, “*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 they all are not of us*” (*I John 2:19*).

These antichrists had at least been in the company of Christians for “*they went out from us*”. But John also states “*they were not of us*”. By use of the “imperfect tense” instead of the “aorist tense”, John is saying to the Greek mind more about the past than just stating they were not of us. He is apparently indicating that all these antichrists “*were never*” of us. The New American Standard Version renders the passage as “*they were not really of us*” to emphasize this distinctive use of the imperfect tense.

One would be hard pressed to think that the antichrists were Christians that had fallen away from the truth when reading John’s exhortation to test these false teachers. These false prophets who have gone out into the world are “*not of God*” (*I John 4:1-3*). “*They are of the world*” (*I John 4:5*).

While these specific antichrists may have infiltrated the company of Christians, and were never true Christians, one should not generalize that when one departs from the faith, it proves that one was never really was the Lord’s. While John makes this point of the “many antichrists”, it does not necessarily follow that “all” who depart from the faith were never really God’s people or saved.

Such a view clearly contradicts Scripture. People “*enlightened*”, who have “*tasted of the heavenly gift*”, “*made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” and “*tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come*” and then “*fell away*” are in a state where it is “*impossible to renew them to repentance*” (*Hebrews 6:4-6*). Are we to believe that these people were “never really saved”?

Was Paul sobered by the Calvinistic doctrine of the “Perseverance Of The Saints” when he offered the possibility of being “*rejected*” by God after preaching to others, and not disciplining his own flesh (*I Cor. 9:26-27, cf. Heb. 6:8*)? If rejected, would it have proven that he was never really saved? Or, would it simply demonstrate the truth that the saved can neglect righteousness and be eternally rejected?

Jesus says many will cry out to Him as “Lord” in the Judgment, appealing to their life of prophesying in His name, and by His name doing many mighty works. Why would these ever go out from others who, as true Christians, “*do all in the name of the Lord*” (*Col. 3:17*)? Yet Jesus will say to them, “*I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (*Matthew 7:22-23*). Jesus’ words remind us that “going out” from the Lord is not the universal criterion of proving that many were never really in the right relationship with the Lord.

By continuing to test the spirits with the revealed distinctive Truth, we can protect ourselves from deceivers who might from time to time be among us.