

**God's provision for persevering in the faith**

1 John 2:18-27

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He was a good friend of mine through high school and into University. We talked about many things including our faith in Christ. We had a lot of fun and some good discussions. Dan (I'll call him) was a missionary kid. He shared some of his field experiences with us. We played hockey together and wondered what life would bring as we entered university. Then he slowly began to change. He didn't mention his faith much. He still met us for lunch but his talk changed too. Finally, he announced one day that he no longer believed in Christ. I remember talking with him about how this decision went down at home. His parents struggled and his family. But he was so sure in his unbelief. To my knowledge, he's never reversed that decision.

I was on a mission's trip. Our team shared lots of experiences together including presenting the gospel through the Jesus film. Troy enthusiastically participated. He connected with many especially when people wanted to talk about Jesus. He got married and did more schooling. One day he told his wife that he didn't believe in God anymore. This struck hard in their marriage eventually ending it. As far as I know, he continues to not believe in Jesus.

You might know someone with a similar story. Maybe it's a spouse, child, other family member or a friend from this church or another church. They once proclaimed faith in Christ. They did a lot that indicated they loved Christ. But then slowly or quickly they drifted away. Today, if you asked them if they believe in Christ as revealed in the Bible, they would likely say no.

Or maybe this describes you. Maybe deep inside are doubts about your faith. Maybe you're on a path like Dan, Troy and others away from the faith. Some people who at one point claimed to be Christians don't end up there.

Yet others keep the faith despite tremendous obstacles in their lives. My Dad lived this out. As long as I knew him, he battled pain. He had a spinal fusion before I was born. In those days, they thought fusing the vertebrae together was one way to deal with back pain. It created more. He endured decades of pain that often brought him down. On top of that, he suffered rheumatism and arthritis. Added to this in his last years was leukemia. Yet, I don't remember ever hearing Dad say "I don't believe in Christ anymore." There were a couple of rare moments when he was down and concluded there was no hope for relief. But he didn't give up the faith.

2 summers ago in Northern Ireland, we stayed a couple of nights with Helen Ramsey's aunt Margaret and uncle Harry at their bed and breakfast. In their hallway, they have a picture of one of their sons and an article about his death

in a horse accident. We never actually talked about that when we were there. But I did notice their deep faith in spite of this tragedy in their lives. Then talking with Helen upon our return, I discovered they had lost second son from complications in a horse accident. Some people would have concluded that God had abandoned them. Yet, they continue in the faith.

Some people give up on the faith. Others persevere in the faith. Some are like Judas. Others are like Peter who stumble yet in the end persevere. Which path are you headed down? It is troubling when we see people around us who once claimed to be Christians, now claim the opposite. We ultimately cannot make decisions for them. We must continue to pray that God will bring them back. But we also must show concern for our own perseverance in the faith to our last day and last breath. How do we get there?

The good news that comes from God and His Word today is this: **God provides so that we can persevere in the faith.** We need His strength to keep going in our faith. Tragedy, exhaustion, confusion and spiritual attack can cause our faith to waver. But God provides so that we can stand firm. We discover this in a somewhat startling but certainly sobering text of John's first letter. John has laid out clear marks of true Christians. They listen to the apostle's teaching; walk in the light which is God; confess their sins and trust Christ to cleanse them; aim by the Holy Spirit's strength to not sin; but when they do sin depend on our advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous. True Christians keep Christ's commandments and walk like Jesus walked. They love their brothers and sisters and deal with any hatred in their hearts. True Christians are forgiven for his name's sake, grow in a deep knowledge of the one who is from the beginning and overcome the evil one. True Christians do not love the world of the things of the world. Instead they love the father and show their love by doing his will.

True Christians persevere in the faith. Our passage today exposes us to a difficult reality John's readers faced, which threatened their perseverance in the faith. A significant number had left their churches claiming to have the true knowledge of Christ. John writes to encourage those who remained and remind them of what they have in Christ. Through this passage, he describes God's provisions for His people to persevere in the faith. First, we're going to see how John raises this problem. Then we'll see the resources from God he describes. Finally, we'll see what John commands us in response to these resources God provides. My hope and prayer is God will use this text to encourage

those of you in the faith to further perseverance and divert those of you going down the path of unbelief back onto the path of belief. Only God can accomplish that.

1 John 2:18-27, ESV

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore 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 it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

**26** I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. **27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

### **How does John introduce the need for God's provision to persevere?**

Well he begins by saying, “Children, it is the last hour.” **What is the last hour?** What do you mean by that John? Well “the last hour” in John’s writings referred to **the time period between Jesus’ resurrection and Jesus’ return.** That is now about a 1900 year period. John heard Jesus’ preach about the arrival of God’s kingdom. John witnessed end times signs like the Baptist’s preaching; the sick healed, the dead raised and the crucified Christ resurrected. If John wrote this in Ephesus late in the first century, he would have seen Jesus’ prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction fulfilled. John was aware that Jesus could return at any time. This has been the case ever since John’s time. Christ could return at any moment. History could end and judgment would take place. Those in Christ will receive their resurrection bodies and enter into that glorious eternal life. But those who have rejected Him will face the righteous wrath of God. John lives with that eternal perspective. It is the last hour.

Yet he doesn’t just think it’s the last hour. He has proof that it’s the last hour. He introduces the proof by writing “You have heard that antichrist is coming.” **Who is antichrist?** John must have taught these readers about antichrist for they heard about him. In fact, he’s the only one who uses this term in the New Testament. Jesus talked about false christs. John talks about the antichrist. **The antichrist is a human representative or embodiment of the evil one.** He will exalt himself against Christ and his kingdom. (2 Thess. 2:1-12). He may follow the pattern foreshadowed by an evil Seleucid king named Antiochus IV Euphron. He sacked Jerusalem about 165 and enforced worship of the

Greek god Zeus. He forced abominable sacrifices to be performed in the temple. He also slaughtered God's people.

He was against God and His people. The antichrist will be against Christ and His people. He will be powerful, persuasive and deceptive. John points to this individual who will come on the scene in the last hour. He reminds his readers to beware of the dark implications of antichrist's nearness if they wish to remain true to the faith.

But the final antichrist's coming is foreshadowed by other antichrists. Here is John's proof that it is the last hour. Verse 18 says "So now many antichrists have come so we know that it is the last hour." Well **who are these antichrists?** Verse 19 – They went out from us. They were **the people who used to be part of the church**. They were people of influence who strayed from the path of faith. In John's view, they never were part of the faith. They withdrew from the church but they did not belong. Had they belonged they would have stayed but they withdrew.

Now this would certainly disturb people remaining in the church. A significant group left. **But why did they leave?** Why couldn't they all just get along? They left because **they disagreed with John and those who remained in the church over the identity of Jesus**. Verse 22 – Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist; he who denies the Father and the Son."

These people denied that Jesus was the Christ; the Messiah; the anointed one; the son of God.

Apparently, the confession, "Jesus is the Christ" was so common among John's readers that he feels no need to explain what it means. But we might need a little explanation. **What does "Jesus is the Christ" mean?** The English word "Christ" comes from the Greek "christos" which translates the Hebrew for "anointed one." He was expected from the Old Testament to come and deliver. He would have divine or God attributes. Jesus himself claimed to be divine. He called himself the Son of Man – an Old Testament title that referred to a divine figure from Daniel 7. He said "Before Abraham was born, I am" applying the holy name of God to Himself. True Christianity declares the teaching that came down from the apostles that **Jesus the man was also God, the Son**. Jesus was the anointed one. Jesus is the Christ.

The ones who left denied this. One common false teaching in those days was that Jesus was born and died just a man. Yet during a part of his life, a Christ presence descended on Jesus. But it left before he went to the cross. This belief developed into something called Gnosticism in the second century after John. It claimed secret knowledge that the Christ presence descended onto Jesus and ascended from Jesus. From this time the 100's came all the other so-called gospels – Gospel of Thomas and Mary Magdalene and Judas. But these gospels have nothing to do with our four

gospels. They are Gnostic gospels with this distorted understanding of Jesus the Christ. It's important to know that so you can answer ridiculous claims like those made in the Da Vinci Code that the church suppressed gospels it didn't like. They're totally different.

But these people with some sort of wrong view of Jesus left the church. They were pretty vocal and persuasive about it. So John awakens his readers to this reality and the stark difference of belief between those who remained and those who went out. This was a serious threat to their perseverance in the faith. And wrong views about Jesus remain a threat today.

Look around in your life – at school; in class; at work; on your team; and in your family. I suspect you know people who would deny that Jesus is the Christ if they were asked; that Jesus is God. Some might say he was a prophet. Some might say he was a good moral teacher. Some might admit that he was a religious founder. Some might deny that he even existed. So what does John say about those people in your life? Verse 22 again – Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.” Did you catch the last part of that verse? John says that if you deny that Jesus is the Christ you deny the Father also. Verse 23 – No one who denies the Son has the Father. So there is none of this “well, we may disagree about Jesus, but we all worship the same God.” No, those are antichrist words that are in this world and have deceived millions and billions.

Yet it can be so subtle. On the surface it can look so much like Christianity. This past Tuesday, I was studying for this message in the public library. I am reading about antichrists who deny that Jesus is the Christ. 5 young people come to a table right near my study desk. Two are wearing white shirts and ties with little badges identifying themselves as elders. They are Mormons of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. There's a young girl at this table. She looks like she's in Grade 8 or maybe Grade 9. They have a Study with readings from the book of Mormon.

But apart from that, the language used would transfer directly into our youth group. The missionaries start talking about how to come to Jesus. “You must repent or turn away from your sins. You must seek forgiveness. Then you begin to live a life that honors God.” Doesn't that sound a lot like our message? They left out how their understanding of Jesus is subtly but vitally different than the apostolic teaching. They believe that Jesus began as a man and grew into being divine. So Jesus became the Christ which is contrary to the Biblical teaching that He was always divine. They prayed at the end and this young girl gets up and thanks them for their time. She goes off maybe about

getting to know a wrong idea about Jesus. This kind of deception is all around us. It is the last hour. Antichrists are around us. So we need help to persevere.

John unveils the Lord's provision and protection throughout this passage. To enable His people to persevere in the faith, **God provides anointing from the Holy One that brings understanding. (20-21)** Verse 20 – But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge. The Holy One – God Himself or Jesus - provides an anointing. He has given us a special gift – a chrisma – an anointing. In the Old Testament, anointing was used to set apart objects or people for sacred use. Aaron and his sons were anointed for their service as priests. Samuel anointed David as king. The Spirit came upon him with power. In Isaiah 61, the servant of the Lord is anointed to bring good news. But these anointing's were limited to a few among the masses of God's people. Here, John describes an anointing poured out on all believers.

But what was this anointing? It is most likely the Holy Spirit. When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit regenerates us or brings us to spiritual life. Then He dwells in us. Just as the Spirit came upon David for his life and ministry, the Spirit is now poured out on all believers.

But He's not just given to us so we have a friend. "You have been anointed by the Holy One and you all have knowledge," or understanding, some of your translations say. Why would they need knowledge? Well, when people, you once thought were true Christians, leave and believe something else, it can be pretty confusing. Those who left claimed to have true knowledge or understanding. But John reassures them that the ones who remained have the right knowledge. They received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And in verse 21 he assures them further. "I write to you, not because you do not know the truth but because you know it, and because no lie is truth." The anointing of the Holy Spirit who guides into truth enables believers to persevere in the faith – to stay on the right path.

It's like a plane coming in for landing in near zero visibility. As the plane descends the pilots may see only clouds out the window. So they have to trust their instruments and the air traffic controller. The pilot may have doubts. "I can't see the airport. I think we're going the wrong way." But the air traffic controller comes on to bring reassurance. "You're doing fine. You're descending at a good rate. Suddenly, the runway lights appear through the clouds and the plane lands safely. Jesus, the Holy One is like our air traffic controller. He's provides us with the guidance system in the Holy Spirit. This enables us to remain steadfast in Him.

But there's another provision of God of which John reminds them. **God provides the word from the beginning.**

Verse 24-25. *Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father.* This word is the gospel, the apostle's teaching and the original message preached. It had not changed and would not change. It was collected and preserved for us in the New Testament. Then the canon or list of New Testament books closed. Nothing more was needed in addition to this word from the beginning.

But the people who left this church claimed they had new knowledge. They claimed they had further understanding beyond the apostles. They led several astray with their teaching. It's been going on ever since. New teachings arise. Someone claims a new revelation with a fuller understanding of God. Then Jesus the Christ becomes Jesus the prophet – or Jesus, the good moral teacher. Or there are new Scriptures added to the Old and New Testament. Or a different translation of the Bible is written to adapt it to the new revelation of some founder. But there are no additions to the Bible that carry equal authority. British scholar John Stott wrote this: *“Christianity is anchored not only to certain historical events, culminating in Jesus, but to the authoritative apostolic witness to and interpretation of these events.”*

We just need the word from the beginning to enable us to persevere. So here's another reason why it's vital for you to get into God's Word. Not only do you get to know God more intimately. Not only do you gain a greater understanding of the Bible's overall storyline and how God calls you into it. Abiding in God's Word enables you to persevere in the faith.

John brings these two great provisions of God – the anointing of the Spirit and the Word together in verses 26 and 27. *“I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him.”*

So the Holy Spirit takes God's Word and applies it to our lives. He helps us understand the Word and enables us to live by the word. We need His constant teaching and guidance about God's Word to protect us from those trying to deceive us. It is possible for people in churches to be deceived. It is possible for whole churches and movements to be deceived.

John writes to assure these Christians that they don't need any other teaching beyond the word from the beginning. They don't need this special knowledge the deceivers claimed to have. They had the Holy Spirit to teach them. Now when John says, "You have no need that anyone should teach you," he's not saying there's no place for teachers in the church. He is teaching through this letter. There is a place for teachers in the church but there's no place for a mediating teacher. There's no place for someone who claims that they have some secret knowledge and access to God and no one comes to the Father except through them. If anyone claims that, they are placing themselves ahead of Jesus. He's the only way. He's the mediator. Godly teachers always point the people to Him. But the Holy Spirit is The Teacher!

God has provided 2 incredible resources for us to persevere in the faith – the anointing of the Holy Spirit for understanding and the word heard from the beginning. Despite a multitude of false teachers, deceivers and antichrists, Christ's church continues today. God protects it and gives us that ability to persevere. Our part is to "abide" in him. You see that at the end of verse 27. The next section is all about what it looks like to abide in Christ. That means we live in dependence upon Christ in constant connection with Him like a branch depends on a tree. We'll talk about this more next week.

But for today, Christians, we need to celebrate God's great provision for our perseverance in the faith. Jesus didn't just leave us here with an inspiring life and some words on a page. He provided us with the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth. He provided the word from the beginning which the Holy Spirit interprets and applies to our lives. He provided the anointing of the Spirit to empower us to remain true and live lives that glorify God. We must celebrate and rest in this great provision from God. We must continue to pray for this great God to rescue those we know who have travelled a road away from Him.

Maybe God revealed to some here, that you do not confess Jesus as the Christ. Maybe you have tried to craft God into your image of what's acceptable to you. But Jesus comes now and says "stop." He invites you to a saving relationship with Him. By that, we mean that instead of trusting yourself and good works to make yourself acceptable to God, you put all your trust upon Jesus. You trust Him personally. You trust the work He did on the cross to bear God's wrath to forgive your sin. You repent or turn away from a life apart from Him.



You begin that dependent, ongoing, abiding relationship with Christ. It is nurtured and grows by connecting with a community of people who confess Jesus is the Christ; by reading His word together and on your own; by praying together and on your own; by serving together; by growing together and by together, receiving protection from deceivers. Will you receive Jesus the Christ?

Some people who called themselves Christians no longer believe. Others persevere despite great tragedy or great deception. Then I asked you to consider what path you're on – the one away from God or the one of persevering? Now, in light of what God has provided for your perseverance, which path will you follow?