

Session 7

February 24, 2019

WHEN FALSE RELIGIONS DECEIVE

1 John 2:18-29

Jesus taught in Matthew 24:4-5 that the beginning of the end would be signaled by a proliferation of false teachers. “Watch out that no one deceives you,” He said. “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many.” He continued in verse 11: “Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many.” In both cases He warns His disciples that the teaching will be deceptive, and that many will fall for it. These are not simply ignorant men who don’t understand the Scriptures; nor are they learned men who hold some unfortunately errant interpretations. These are cunningly deceitful enemies of God who knowingly and deliberately seek to undermine the gospel of Christ. In this text, John offers some striking details about these false teachers, then contrasts them with those who are true to the faith.

Those who leave (vv. 18-23). First, he says false teachers will forsake *the fellowship*. He calls them “antichrists;” those deceptive false teachers who foreshadow the singular Antichrist of Revelation 13. The phrase “last hour” signals that we are in the final stages of God’s redemptive plan. Moreover, these false teachers will come from *within* the church (see also Matt. 7:15; Jude 4). They are not apostates who have lost their salvation (which is impossible according to Scripture), but rather counterfeits who were never saved to begin with. The final part of verse 19 tells us that their forsaking of the fellowship is a necessary act to clearly identify them as what they are: false teachers.

Not only will false teachers forsake the fellowship, but they will also forsake *the Son*. The standard by which all knowledge is measured is the standard of unchanging, uncompromising *truth*. Our God is the God of truth (Jer. 5:3). Jesus called Himself the truth (John 14:6), described the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth (John 14:7), and said God’s word is truth (John 17:17). Because God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and God’s word the Bible are all *truth*, you can’t separate them out, holding one as true while denying another! False teachers will always identify themselves as counterfeits by denying some aspect of God’s truth: either His person or His word. John is very clear here: “no lie comes from the truth” (v. 21). So, anyone who denies the validity of God’s revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ is simply a liar. And that makes him a false teacher.

Those who remain (vv. 24-29). Next, John distinguishes the true believers he writes to from the false teachers he condemns. Whereas those who leave forsake the truth, those who remain affirm it, embrace it, and continue in it. In fact, John used the word “remain” six times in these six verses. It’s a common word that is often translated as *abide* and expresses the characteristics of continuity and consistency. Believers are told twice to remain steadfast in the simple truth of the gospel they initially received (vv. 24), and three times to remain in Him (vv. 24, 27, 28). In exchange, the truth remains in the believer (v. 24), as well as the Holy Spirit’s presence and anointing (v. 27; see also v. 20).

John finishes these verses by mentioning two practical benefits of remaining steadfast in God's truth; one for the future and one for the present. First, remaining in God's truth guarantees confidence in the day of His appearance. Simply put, there will be no reason to fear Him or His judgment when He comes (see also Is. 45:17; Mark 8:38; Rom. 5:5; 1 Peter 2:6). Second, believers steadfast in His truth are equipped to live godly lives here and now, while awaiting His glorious return.