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They Went Out From Us

1 John 2:18

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for who you are, Lord, I thank you for the glory of your name, I thank you for that name that is above all names, and Lord, for the gifts that you've given to us not the least of which is this place where we can still come and offer corporate worship up to you each week. We thank you for that, Lord. And there's so many places in this world where that is not even a possibility and it's ours still and so we thank you for that. We pray, Lord, for the gift of your Holy Spirit. We pray that you would accompany your word and to make it of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well what do you think of when you hear the word "antichrist"? I mean in a word it kind of conjures up evil. It also conjures up the idea of end times and the devil and this ongoing war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. Antichrist can mean either of two different things. The Greek word for "anti" means either "against" or it means "in place of." Both of them are appropriate ways to describe what the word conjures up when it

comes to Jesus Christ. You see antichrist is someone who stands opposed to Christ and the gospel or someone who substitutes himself in place of Christ and the gospel. And John has been giving us insights as to how to deal with this world that surrounds us, how this is a world that's at war with God's kingdom, and John says this, in *1 John 2:15*, he says: *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.* John's talking about war. And this war of the world has been ongoing since the garden of Eden, it's going to continue until Christ returns.

Last week we looked at how John focused on our personal walk and the ways of the kingdom of this world, how the kingdom of darkness seeks to either destroy us or to make us ineffective. He does that by making what is addicting seem satisfying through the lust of the flesh; what is worthless seem precious through the lust of the eyes; and what is foolish seem wise through the pride of life.

You see, John wants us to know everything that we can about that evil that sits right outside our doorstep and so he begins to turn the focus from the internal to the external, and the word that he first brings up is this word "antichrist". Our text this morning is *1 John 2:18: 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. Now this antichrist singular standing either opposed to or instead of Jesus Christ is differentiated from a hosts of antichrists plural that have plagued the church since the beginning shortly after Jesus went on to heaven. If you notice in many of the translations you notice the word antichrist which appears twice in that passage, in one case it's capitalized, in one case it's not. Well the capitalized one is the Antichrist who will specifically represent Satan here on earth, not as an incarnation of Satan himself in the flesh but as an extremely powerful human being, a world leader as such who will be given whole-heartedly over to Satan. John expected him to come shortly. Even though it's been 2,000 years since then, the antichrist still has not yet arrived. We know that at the end Christ will be coming to defeat the Antichrist but in the meantime many antichrists plural have come.

And John in our text this morning gives us a very simple working definition of who these antichrists really are. This is verse 22. He says: *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son.* So there's our definition. An antichrist is someone who denies the deity of Jesus Christ. Now in Jesus's day, it was the Gnostics who brought the spirit of antichrist to the newfound church and they were claiming this secret knowledge that was revealed only to a select few. Well

in our day, there are so many different antichrists who either subtly or blatantly deny the deity of Christ that you need to truly have discernment to understand just who is who, and it all comes down to how they understand Jesus.

I mean you may have wondered why people still draw distinctions about the differences between Protestants and Catholics and the differences between, say, Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. I mean we still have lots of issues that separate Protestants and Catholics but both groups believe that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Well, both Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons reject that idea. I mean these two groups, they're really classically antichrist and that even though they speak frequently about Jesus in glowing terms, they both deny his deity. I mean Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was the highest created being but nonetheless they still believe he was created by God and is therefore not God. And Mormons believe that Jesus was at one point a mere man who elevated himself to God-like status as we can, so they teach, if they follow Joseph Smith and the teachings of Mormonism.

So denying the deity of Jesus Christ is basically the first order of business for antichrists. John then links this denial of Christ to everyone who abandons their faith. This is what he says. He

says: *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. 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.*

Okay. So those who actively deny Christ are antichrists, small "A" plural. John says that those who have -- quote -- "*gone out from us*" are those small "A" antichrists. Today we have a special term to describe them. We also have a special term to describe the process of going out, and that term is now called "deconstruction." If you think of a house as a construction process then the process of deconstructing it would be starting from the roof, working your way down through the roof trusses to the rafters to the studs and the sheathing, and each phase of it would involve the methodical taking apart of a building. Well the deconstruction of Christianity involves basically the same process. I mean at some point people who think they are believers or were believers in Christ, they begin to question what it is they believe, and that in itself is perfectly legitimate. Even John says: *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.* But testing the spirit also involves testing your motivation for

testing the spirit, and in this case you know it maybe be LGBTQ influences or politics or culture or any of a number of different reasons that might cause these folks to question their faith. I mean the roof might be evolution and the rafters might be the God of the New Testament and the stud walls might be the atonement or the historical evidence of Jesus and the resurrection. I mean the point is that deconstruction is that someone who at some point in the process, well he or she decides that this building is just not holding up, the faith has collapsed.

I mean many of you are familiar with Joshua Harris who wrote the book *I Kissed Dating Good-Bye*, and he wrote it at age 18 and it became a million seller, it had a serious impact on the way evangelicals perceive courting and dateship. Harris went on to become the pastor of a mega church in Maryland. He spoke often at conferences. I went to hear him at Together for the Gospel. He also wrote a book that we've used for years in our new membership class, the book was entitled "*Stop Dating the Church.*" It was an outstanding book for new members to understand what a church is all about. Well, long story short Josh wound up leaving his troubled church and he decided to go to seminary in Vancouver. And then after a while shortly thereafter he announced that he and his wife were divorcing and shortly after that he announced that he considered himself no longer a Christian. He deconstructed. This

is a classic deconstruction story because it involved kind of an evangelical superstar who had a huge reputation and following. So his story sent shock waves throughout the whole of the evangelical community and it turns out he was among the very first but there are now thousands of young people who have followed in the steps of Josh and determined that in their view this house of evangelical faith is no longer standing.

And what's truly sad to see is that the evidence that drives so many of these deconstructions are not hard and fast facts that have suddenly arisen to disprove the truth of the gospel. It is far more hard and fast attitudes toward evangelical and biblical culture that are now seen as rigid, as unbending, as uncaring and unloving towards LGBTQ individuals or anti-feminists or uncomfortably leaning to the right when it comes to politics. I mean there are many who make the argument that there was so much wrong with the evangelicalism, between the prosperity gospel and the moral failings of noted evangelical leaders, that it was inevitable that people would eventually become fed up with its moral shortcomings. By and large much of the exiting done by the deconverters have to do not with their discomfort of evangelical culture but also by their unhappiness with the actual claims of the Bible, from the belief in the exclusivity of the gospel to belief in a literal eternal hell. And add to that the demands of biblical

sexual ethics and you have a lot of people claiming this is not what I signed up for. And part of that comes from the church's failure to lay out clearly what it believes, to give a clear biblical teaching on what it is the Bible teaches.

So now we have ex-vangelicals which are obviously ex-evangelicals. We have nones, N-O-N-E-S, not N-U-N-S which are not groups of religious women but are people who select the "none" box when it comes to religious affiliation are now called "nones." We have podcasts like the folks like Rhett & Link who are two ex-Christians who used to work for Campus Crusade. They've parlayed their deconversion into a podcast that has over seven billion with a B, seven billion views. They got 17 million subscribers.

So how are we to understand John's statement when he says: *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.* I don't know, is that sour grapes? I mean is John looking at those who walked away from the church in the first century with some of the bitterness that I've seen expressed towards deconverters today? I don't think so. I think what John was saying is exactly what Jesus proclaimed when he spoke of what we call "the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints." See, Jesus said that anyone who is

fully converted will stay fully converted for his entire lifetime and for eternity. And he said that for one reason and one reason only is because they didn't do the converting because Jesus did. And it all takes place in a conversation that Jesus had with the Pharisees. These are, again, these are folks who have witnessed countless miracles and Jesus's power and they still utterly reject him. Jesus in this conversation is explaining why they reject him and why his sheep accept him and why his sheep who remain his sheep for all time.

This is the conversation that takes place in *John 10:22*. It says: *Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*

Now so much of what Jesus is claiming here about his sheep, so much of this flies in the face of our understanding of our own personal autonomy. I mean we like to think of ourselves as rugged individuals who make our own choices and decisions and bear our own consequences. And God sees this far differently than we do. We see ourselves uniquely as free individuals; God sees us as redeemed slaves. He sees us as people who have been bought and paid for at a great price, the price of Jesus's own blood., *1 Peter 1:17* says: *Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

You see, as redeemed slaves we are a people who belong lock, stock and barrel to Jesus by virtue of his purchase of us on the cross. I mean did you realize, did you actually think that if you're one of Jesus's sheep, that Jesus says that you've been given to him as a gift from the Father to the Son. I mean how's it feel to realize that God has chosen to gift you to his Son? I mean that's exactly what Jesus is saying when he says in verse 29: *"My Father, who has given them to me,"* and as I've said before "them" is us. Jesus claims that those who believe in him do so because they belong to him as his sheep. He goes on to say those who do not belong to him

find it impossible to believe in him. Verse 26: *"But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you."*

So here's the Father and Son acting like they have the right of ownership of all us believers. What about the Holy Spirit? Well, if you recall Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus tells Nicodemus, *"You must be born again."* But who does Jesus say has the power to do that? Where does that power come from but the Holy Spirit. And again we look at a conversation that took place in John 3. It says: *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."* Now the wind that blows

where it wishes is of course the Holy Spirit, and Jesus is clearly stating that the Spirit of God, just like the Father and the Son, doesn't ask permission for anything. It simply blows where it wishes. And wherever it goes, it opens the eyes, the ears, the hearts, and the minds of those who then receive the gospel.

Now folks, that's a far cry from the image that many people have of Jesus knock, knock, knocking on the door of your heart asking for permission to come in. But once again, that's an image from scripture that's twisted out of place to fit a narrative. And the narrative insists that Jesus needs our permission before he can claim us as his own. But if you look at the actual story as it occurs in the book of Revelation, Jesus is not knocking on the door of anyone's heart. Actually what he's doing is he's knocking on the door of a church and it's a church that he's not happy with at all in the first place.

This is what Jesus says in *Revelation 3:14*. He says: *"And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."* Jesus then goes on to say to this church, he says:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

You see, Jesu's right to us, that may well offend our sense of personal autonomy. But the whole idea that our personal autonomy reigns supreme, that whole idea tends to evaporate if you look at it. Just ask yourself what kind of control have I ever had over anything in my life? I mean, what control have I ever had over where, when and how I was even born? I mean did I ever have anything to do with my being born in the United States? Why not Borneo or China or Siberia? And how about when I was born? I mean why was I born in the 20 or 21st century? Why not the first or the third or the fiftieth? We had no say whatsoever in that. How about to whom I was born? I mean was it royalty, was it peasants, was it criminals, was it just average folk? We have no say in any of those things. And we also have no say whatsoever in where, when and how we leave this earth. And yet somehow in this brief period of time that we exist on the earth we tend to think that we're the authors of our existence. We're not. We're just participants in it. And our faith comes not from us, it comes from Jesus. I mean *Hebrews 12:2: Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.* God goes on to say very clearly to his sheep that we belong exclusively to him. For many people that's an outrageous claim.

It's interesting that one of the main reasons why folks deconstruct the faith is because of bodily autonomy issues. We don't want God acting like he's the boss of our bodies even though every single breath we breathe is at his pleasure. God again makes it clear to his sheep by saying in *1 Corinthians 6*: *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

So God tells believers in Jesus Christ that you're not your own, that you've been purchased at the price of Jesus's own blood, that they are his sheep, and the reason why they believe is because they were gifted to Jesus from the Father and chosen by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as the redeemed to be shaped and molded into the very image of Christ for the glory of God, and no one asked your permission. It's like Jesus said to his disciples in *John 15*. He said: *You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.*

Now perhaps someone would say, well, that was the disciples that Jesus chose. It doesn't change the issue at all, I mean, you'll notice he didn't ask their permission either. You see, Jesus has the right to choose his disciples, his followers, his sheep, his

believers, anyone he chooses to because he bought us all at the cost of his blood. And that puts a dagger right through the heart of our personal autonomy that says that we get to make those choices. See, the reason why we believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is because we recognize that the one who's responsible for our faith is the same one who sustains it, and the one who sustains it very clearly says that no one can snatch it away. *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."* So there's never one of Christ's sheep who is ever snatched out of his hand or out of the Father's hand. We sheep are absolutely safe in that respect.

So the question that remains, the big question is am I one of his sheep? What John is telling us this morning is one quick way to tell if you're not. *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.* Again, that's right in line with what Jesus explained when he spoke about this whole idea in the parable of the sower of the seed. Let me just give you that. This is *Matthew 13: And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow.*

And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."

Of course Jesus is teaching us something here that is absolutely critical. He's teaching us that his sheep are never, never lost but that there's lots of folks who think they're sheep when they're not. Jesus said some seed would be sown on rocky soil which would cause the seed to sprout up quickly at first because it's warm and it's shallow but because it's shallow it would then wilt in the heat of the day when the pressure begins to mount. These are souls who give every indication at the very first that they're solidly among his sheep and as things get harder and harder, they bail. *They went out from us, but they were not of us.* Jesus also said there'd be seed cast into thorny soil, it would continue to grow but it would become choked by thorns and weeds. And that's the thorns and weeds of worldliness, and they, too, would go out from us. And then Jesus also said some seed would land on hard ground, it would never even get started, but some would land in good soil

and would grow and reproduce *"some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty, he has who has ears, let him hear."*

So there's four soils that Jesus is speaking of here and of the four soils that he spoke about, three of them, three of them give evidence of some kind of spiritual birth, but Jesus is quick to point out that two of those three are spurious. I mean, the stony soil and the thorny soil plants are non-believers whose profession of faith is short-lived and not real. And furthermore Jesus gives us an explicit warning about false faith in *Matthew 7*. He says this: *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*

So how do we resolve this issue of faith, I mean, this gigantic question, can I lose my salvation? There are many dear believers who actually believe that. I'm not one of them. I mean there are only two states of being according to this warning of Jesus, there are those who are truly saved and those who never were. There's no intermediate state of being in my opinion, there's no intermediate state where you're safe for a period of time only to lose your

salvation only because of some sin or betrayal. Notice the way Jesus speaks to the lost in his warning. He doesn't say I no longer know you, depart from me, or your sin has separated you from me, depart from me. No, it's far more basic what Jesus says to these people. He says, "*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.*" These folks never had salvation and then lost it. They never had it and they never realized it. They were stunned, because the ones that they had succeeded in deceiving the most were themselves.

The reason why I don't believe we can ever lose our salvation is we aren't the ones who obtained it in the first place, but that still leaves us to wonder, are we miraculously preserved by God as a gift given from the Father to the Son to be sanctified, set apart, grown and developed into unique images of Jesus Christ for God's glory? Or are we among those bewildered, rocky and thorny soil believers who find at the end Jesus telling them, "*Depart from me; I never knew you*"? That's the most hideous words that human ears could ever hear, and it's a genuine dilemma. I mean I've met numerous people over the years who have struggled mightily thinking they might be rocky or thorny soil Christians. And I've also had numerous occasions to interact with folks who thoroughly believed in the opposite position, that is "once saved, always saved." I'm sure you've heard that. Folks hear *Romans 10:9*. It says: *That if*

you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

And they hear that and they genuinely believe that if anyone makes a sincere profession of faith at any point in their life, then God's going to honor that profession regardless the type of life the person chooses to live. And they argue that the gospel's not based on works, which is absolutely true, it's based on grace and grace alone, which is again, absolutely true. And if my works can ever earn my way into heaven, then it logically follows that if I profess a sincere belief even in the absence of works or if I perhaps profess a sincere belief and then later on fall way from that conduct produced by sincere belief, well I may be a carnal Christian? But I'm nonetheless a heaven-bound believer in Christ. Well, the problem is a person who believes and acts this way is someone who's suffering a short term memory loss going back no further than two paragraphs in this very letter that John has written us. I mean John is clearly unequivocal in practically demonstrating the proof of *Romans 10:9*. He says, if you truly do confess Jesus as Lord and believe -- and here's the crucial part -- and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, then you'll be living an essentially different life than the life you lived before. Why? Because the normal human heart that all of us is born with is not capable of heartfelt believing that God raised Jesus from the dead. It's not capable of anything other

than deceit and wickedness according to Jeremiah, who says: *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"* One thing the scripture makes clear is that the only way desperately wicked hearts can believe is if they get transplanted by God so that that heart of stone is yanked out and a heart of flesh is put out in its place. How many times have you heard me repeat the process as described in *Ezekiel 36*, God says: *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

You know those sheep who hear that voice of the shepherd Jesus and follow him? They follow him because every one of them has received a heart transplant. Not that they've asked for it. I don't recall asking for mine. But that God has chosen to give it to them. And it's that new heart and that new spirit inside of them that God says causes these sheep to want *to walk in his statutes and be careful to obey his rules*. Now if you've been given a new heart along with a new desire and particularly a desire to obey, it's reasonable to assume that that new heart will be reflected by the way you live your life. So much so that John basically says the

proof of the pudding, it's in the eating. And the proof that a heart transplant has taken place can be seen in the way you live your life. And John makes that clear that the proof that your heart has been changed and literally transplanted is not just what you say, it's what you do. He says: *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

You know, I once visited a man in a hospital who was clearly dying, he had been diagnosed with advanced cirrhosis of the liver. He proudly told me that he had consumed over a fifth of whiskey every day for many, many years. He lived a generally profligate life. So I asked him, I said, how do you feel about eminently meeting God? He told me not to worry. He told me, he said, don't worry, in that case. I'm in great shape and then he proceeded to tell me that some forty years earlier he had gone to a Billy Graham rally and the preacher told folks to come forward and to give his life to Christ, and he did. And he told that the man told him that they were signed, sealed, and delivered and their salvation was sure in Christ. So he was quite confident that he was going to enter heaven having done what he thought was necessary to secure his salvation. But John says: *He who says, "I know Him," and does not*

keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

I thought how many like him are going to receive the worst news they could possibly ever receive? I mean those false believers who went out from John's church, they didn't go out because they suddenly decided to deconstruct from the early church, and not because they had a negative change of heart. *"They went out from us because they were not of us."* John goes on to say if they were part of Christ's sheep, they would have never left. *If they had been of us, they would have continued with us.* All their leaving proved was that they were never a part of them. *But they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.*

And so the question that all of us have to answer this morning is to which group do we belong? Am I one of his sheep or am I one of those who is actively kidding myself? There's also another question that we have to ask ourselves about that very question, it's perhaps the most important question you'll ever ask of yourself. The question is: Do you care? You see, if you're one of his sheep, if you've had that heart transplant that gives you the ability to hear his voice and seek to follow him, then the Spirit of Christ himself is now inside you. Verse 27: *I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

So you want to ask yourself, should I examine myself? Is God's Spirit living within me? It's an examination that every one of us needs to make on a regular basis. *2 Corinthians 13* says: *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!* Great, we need to examine ourselves, okay, how do you do that? How do you examine yourself? *1 John* makes it very simple. It says: *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.* You see, if you're one of his, if you are walking in step with the Spirit of Christ within you then grace and peace will be part of your walk and if you're one of his and you are actively engaged in sin and disobedience, then the Spirit of Christ within you will be giving you no peace until you deal with the sin. There'll be a literal war inside you, and the war will be between your spirit and the Holy Spirit, both who live inside you.

This is how David put it when he was undergoing that very war. In *Psalms 51* he said: *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.* That's the mark of a believer, you have the Holy Spirit living inside you. When you start to sin, your sin will be ever before you. But David also knew he could bring his sin and his broken spirit before God for healing. *Psalms 51:17* says: *The*

sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. See, this is how sanctification works. God exposes our sins, our transgressions; we confess, we repent, we move forward. And so if grace and peace or the conviction of sin and disobedience are foreign concepts to you, if they just don't resonate at all, then chances are pretty good the Spirit of Christ is not in you. And the most telling part of the diagnosis, the most poignant part is that you genuinely won't care. Those people who went out from under the church at the very beginning, they didn't care. Their conscience gave them a complete pass because the Spirit of Christ was never there to object. And they to a person thought that was a great blessing. You see, these folks are not troubled in their spirit because there's no spirit to trouble. As Gertrude Stein once said, there's no there there. It feels like the best place in the world but it's really the worst. 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. May that never be said of you or me. Let's pray.

Father, I want to pray right now for your Holy Spirit who is in this room. You have said where two or more are gathered, you are there in our midst. And I pray, Lord, for anyone who is wondering am I that person, am I that person who has been kidding myself all

along that I am actually one of his sheep, Lord, as I said, I've had conversations many a time with people and I say, do you care? One of the marks of someone having the Spirit of Christ inside him is they care. They care about where they're coming from. Lord, I just pray that if there's someone today who says, it's not a big deal, I can put it off, Lord, I pray that you would produce in them the sense of caring, the sense of needing to get it right, the desire to examine oneself, the desire to see if the Spirit of Christ is in. And I pray, Lord, for each and every person who doesn't feel that, they would sense their presence and that you would give them that gift right here and right now. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.