

Apostasy: The Deadly Danger of Walking Away (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] This is actually part two of a message that we started last week on apostasy and apostates within the church.

Next Monday, Lord willing, we'll have part three. And then we'll move into Hebrews chapter 11.

We're rapidly coming to the conclusion of Hebrews.

I would anticipate by first of the year. But I already have in mind a companion study to Hebrews that I would like to suggest.

And we'll look at that probably after the holidays. In our study, we defined apostasy and apostates this way.

Apostasy is an abandonment of what one has professed, a total desertion or departure from one's faith.

[1 : 24] An apostate then is one who has forsaken the church to which he before adhered. It applies to one who once believed but now has become false and traitorous.

And as we finished up last time, we were left with a puzzling question. Would a person who knows the gospel at somewhat of a deep level, maybe not all the intricacies, none of us know the intricacies.

And I read Paul Worsher today in a new book he's got out that says, we probably won't plumb the depths in eternity. It's too deep.

But we're going to have fun trying. But why would a person who knows the gospel at some level, has seen the light of Christ, experience blessings that can only come from the Holy Spirit, turn back and reject such a marvelous and wonderful gift?

What would cause a person to do that? If we pursued a simple answer to that question, I think we would come quickly to willful unbelief.

[2 : 49] An apostate chooses to not believe. When you find someone who rejects the truth concerning Christ as Lord and Savior, typically, the reason they reject that truth, and the best answer I can come up with, they do so because they want to.

I don't know if there's any better answer than that. They want to reject that truth. Following our own will in the face of such overwhelming divine truth does not have any valid reasons.

But getting there is another matter altogether. There can be a host of things that would cause one to forsake God, to reject his Creator.

So in this portion of our study this evening, we're going to examine what can best be called the causes of apostasy. And we're going to review several causes, not exhaustive as I'm sure many others.

But the first one on our list this evening as to causes of apostasy is persecution. Having had the opportunity to serve on the Board of Directors at Voice of the Martyrs for nearly 24 years, I have, from time to time, seen persecution up close.

[4 : 33] I've also been exposed to some horrifying accounts of persecution, oftentimes by the person that experienced them. or the wife that was now a widow because her husband experienced them.

We had a, in Pakistan one time, we had a great minister of the Gospel who was gunned down in the pulpit, killed in front of his wife and seven children, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When persecution comes, it seems to drive a true believer and maybe even a marginal believer, one we might classify as a baby in Christ, closer to the Lord.

Of a truth, we can say that persecution tends to strengthen the faithful and it makes them stronger. Such strength manifests itself in building a person both spiritually and morally. But at the same time, persecution can and does drive unbelievers away from the church, away from fellowship with true believers, and even from the things of God.

[5 : 56] Why would anyone anyone that is not a genuine follower of Christ, a genuine follower of Christ want to hang around and be severely persecuted, perhaps even losing their own life?

This might be one of the explanations concerning the departure of Judas Iscariot. Probably the greatest example in Scripture of an apostate. In China, you know, we have an underground church. It's not underground necessarily, although they do meet in basements and caves at times. But it's interesting there because someone will come and they'll say, I want to join your church.

And they said, okay, said, we'll see. Hang around. Well, I'd like to join tonight.

No. Just hang around us. Let's give it a year or two. And they see, invariably, when persecution comes and people start coming in and arresting people in those churches, a lot of those people leave.

[7 : 13] They don't want to be around for that. Many people simply do not want to pay the price demanded of them when in reality, if we knew their heart, it really means so little to them.

some people will leave a church if they experience mild criticism. Other people leave because they're not there for any spiritual reason in the first place.

They may be there because of family pressure. And many a man attend church because his wife, you know, it was easy to go to church and listen to her nagging about it. They may be there because of social pressure.

Maybe your company in a small town expects you to be there. Maybe your boss is a member of that church. And every Monday he says, I didn't see you in church yesterday.

Well, there's a message in that. There is, however, even more graphic examples of departing from faith because of apostasy.

[8 : 27] Sometimes, apostates leave the church and join forces with the persecutors, the people that were persecuting the church.

In Matthew 24, verse 9 and 10, we read, and then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death. You will be hated by all nations for my namesake.

And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. That was written by the Creator of the universe, the all-wise Christ Jesus.

people are going to fall away and betray one another and hate one another. Some apostates go beyond turning away from the church.

They turn against the church. They turn against it. Judas did that. He told the members of the Sanhedrin, he said, I know where they're going to be.

[9 : 37] I can take you to them. I hate it when Hollywood makes a movie. Now, the Passion of Christ was pretty good. But usually, they show Judas as a victim.

You know, he just made a mistake. He wasn't intentional. Well, that's malarkey. He knew what he was doing. Another reason for apostasy can be the influx of false teachers inside a congregation. Matthew 24, 11, and meant Jesus talking. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Here's a great quote from John MacArthur.

You've heard that name. Persecution frightens unbelievers away from the church. False teachers entice unbelievers away from the church.

But either way, they go away from the church. Now, let's be honest here. False teachers can do a lot of damage inside a church among unbelievers.

[10 : 49] They can latch on to an unbeliever and do tremendous damage. They can also damage new believers. But false teachers can harm even more mature believers.

believers. This is all why we all need to be people of the book. We need to be grounded in our faith. We need to know what we believe and we need to know why we believe it.

And that takes diligent study in the scriptures. We should be well grounded in the word of God. But we do know this.

A true believer, no matter how immature at this point in their Christian walk, will not be led ultimately away to the point of denying their Lord.

Not if they're a true believer. They won't do that. Now, sometimes unbelieving people get fed up with hearing the truth. They'd rather have something to feed on that doesn't give them an upset

stomach on their way home.

[11:53] great verse of scripture about that. 2 Timothy 4.3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.

If you've got leadership in a church that's false, they're going to hire false teachers. They're sure not going to get some evangelical, Bible-believing guy at a master's college and seminary.

Temptation can also lead someone into apostasy. Temptation often occurs when the things of this world become more attractive than do the things of God.

temptation and people can be influenced into temptation. The apostates in this category would be those whose faith was founded on the rocky soil.

Remember those parables? Well, this is the rocky soil. The roots of faith could not grow because the rocks would inhibit them.

[13:15] The rocks would not allow any depth to be attained when temptations come to the unbeliever, he does not possess the resources to resist.

In other words, he's not indwelt with the Holy Spirit to guide him into truth. We have a Bible example of just such a person. 2 Timothy 4.10 for Demas in love with the present world, that's a clue, isn't it, has deserted me, that's Paul speaking, and gone to Thessalonica.

It appears that Demas not only abandoned Paul, but he abandoned the Lord Jesus as well. Well, Demas was an apostate.

And then we have another category of neglect. And that may be the saddest category that we're going to mention this evening. It's probably the most frequent cause of apostasy as well.

People neglect the things of the Spirit of God as he moves in their life. They just neglect it. they're busy with other things.

[14:43] They're having too much fun with life. We had a guy here years ago, he grew up in the church, parents were still members, they're all, they're both dead now. And he was mildly successful in his job, and was able to accumulate a little money, and he bought a cabin on Grand Lake, or a house on Grand Lake, and a boat, and a dock, and then we never saw him.

He came to his parents' funeral. I thought that was rather nice of him, but other than that, they were just gone. They had other things that were drawing them away.

Too much fun with life. They may be part of the church, but their participation decreases over time until ultimately it is pushed out by the things of life.

They get to the point where they just do not have time for God. And it's not that they're overtly evil toward God or the church, but spiritual things are not a priority in their life.

But the further spiritual things are pushed out, the more the world, the flesh, and the devil will fill the void, because nature abhors a vacuum, and something will come in.

[16:13] Just a very few years ago, I did three funerals that year, and as it turned out, they were three unbelievers. That's hard. not easy.

One family was totally unconcerned about their loved one and unconcerned about the afterlife because they did not believe in God, heaven, or hell. I'll never forget that.

I knew them well. By invitation, I went to their house to do an order of service, and the first thing she said to me in front of her daughters, now you know we're not believing people as far as God and Jesus and all that stuff, and I said, and you know if I'm going to do this funeral, I'm going to talk about God and Jesus.

Oh yeah, we know that. We know that. That's okay. But I just wanted to let you know where I said, I'm very well aware of where you stand, because your husband stood the same place who used to work for me.

But I did these three funerals. That was the first family. Another family was unconcerned because the wife and mother died a good person.

[17:29] And if there is a God, according to the family, they said, he would not allow a good person to go to hell. Well, that's true. God would never allow a good person to go to hell if there were any.

If there were any. Romans chapter three, starting first ten, read through eighteen. There's none good. No, not one. Not even one.

None who choose God. Great section of scripture. In a third case, the surviving daughter was a believer herself, and she was trying desperately.

and I don't hold this against her at all, trying desperately to hang her hat on something. And she said many years ago, her mother told her, you know, I prayed a prayer one time about getting saved.

And that was it. I was always convinced on whether or not my dad was saved. And I asked him one time, Tom, you're going to die and we're not going to know where you're at.

[18 : 45] And I said, you can settle that issue. And all of a sudden, he bowed his head and he went like this. Okay, it settled. I mean, that was it. You know, one and a half seconds.

the truth is you can neglect your way into apostasy. People that neglect Christ have already decided against him.

Is there a verse that supports all this? Conclusion? Well, let's try one. We studied it months ago. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 1 and then the first half of verse 3.

We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard lest we drift away from it. And then verse 3, the first part, and you've all heard this one, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

How are we going to escape? Neglect? And the answer is we're not. another one is holding on to the past.

[20 : 00] This form of belief is not overtly evil, but it can be dangerous. The best example we have of this are the Jews that are in this Hebrew congregation.

They had practiced the religion of their parents, the religion of their grandparents, their older ancestors. This had been around for like 1600 years, and they were in grave danger because nothing in their religious system would or could bring them to salvation.

You won't find salvation even in the law. It drives us to see our need for a savior, someone that fulfilled the law.

And in fact, the Jewish religion had become an impediment to salvation. Jesus fought Jewish religion every day he was on earth. And we can say that actually it condemned him, had him arrested, turned over to the Romans, and executed.

That was religion did that. False teaching and false religion erects barriers to salvation. And then another one is abandoning or forsaking Christian fellowship.

[21 : 23] Now the writer of Hebrews has already mentioned this earlier in Hebrews chapter 10. Let us hold fast, starting in verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The day of what? The day of Christ. The day of judgment. The day of the return of Christ. But focus on those words not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some.

The place to experience a strong influence of Christ is to dwell among the people of God. You know the old story, and I won't even repeat it because you've all heard it, but you got two logs and a fire and you're a great fire in a cold winter night and you separate them and they go out.

Bring them back together, they reignite and get a little warmth. We're logs. We need to be together, burn brighter. We need to dwell among the Lord's people.

[22 : 53] You do that in a Christ honoring and a Word of God preaching church. I want to challenge everybody in here. If you were not in that auditorium, sanctuary, during Pastor Mike's sermon yesterday, you look that up on the internet and watch it with a pen in hand.

I don't think you're going to hear a finer message and a more convicting message. I just got convicted.

There's great joy in hanging out with the believers. I love Monday night. I love Wednesday. I love Saturday when we have our breakfast. I love the fellowship.

I love the devotions. I love the breakfast. That's good too. I like that. We get together for fellowship, for prayer, for Bible study.

We've got Reformation Sunday coming up, the 29th in the evening. And the main speaker is going to talk about John Calvin, dynamic guy, really a good song.

[24 : 08] Well, let me cut to the three. I'm speaking about John Calvin that night. If Mike doesn't want to fill in for me. I'll give you my notes, Mike. But we can meet many times.

We can meet and do special projects. We've got people with needs. We've got widows with needs. We've got people with needs. Let's find out what they are and let's fulfill those needs.

When you have someone who is considering Christ but has made no commitment to Him, the worst place they can be is away from the presence of true believers.

That's where they need to be. When that person finally enters into a state of apostasy, there are results. There are results.

And actually, I came up with a good title for this portion of our study. The results of apostasy. I thought, you know, I worked at that. Abandoning Scripture and abandoning the Lord always carries with it results.

[25 : 21] And that's what apostates do. Now, let me give you the verses. Hebrews chapter 10 beginning in verse 26, which we've looked at now for two weeks.

verse 26 to verse 31. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

What adversaries? The adversaries to the Lord. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

That's the Old Testament law. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who is trampled underfoot, the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace.

For we know him who said, vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

[26 : 58] We should all do business with those words, especially those who are flirting with apostasy who are not genuine believers, but they're flirting with whether they want to be a genuine believer or abandon the church.

We should do business with those words. And actually, we're going to do business with those words, but we're going to wait until next time because it's going to take a while. We're going to cover verses 26 to 39 next time.

I've made that promise before, but that's my intent anyway.