Apostasy: The Deadly Danger of Walking Away (Part 1)

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[0:00] When I started working on this lesson about ten days ago,! My goal, my design was to cover Hebrews chapter 10, Verse 26-39.

And the lesson kept developing, and I finally had to run up the surrender flag and realize that wasn't going to happen. So tonight, instead of covering verses 26-39, I'm going to cover verse 26.
And we'll leave the other, 27-39 for later dates, probably dates plural. But verse 26 in chapter 10 of Hebrews says this, For if we go on sinning deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.
So we come this evening to one of the most serious and sobering sections of Scripture in all of God's Word.
And I've got an alternate title. This portion of our study could appropriately be called Apostasy, The Deadly Danger of Walking Away.
[1:46] That is an appropriate subtitle, because apostasy, as we will see, is both dangerous and deadly.

I wanted to come up with a fairly solid definition for both apostasy and apostate.
And to do that, I fell back on a fellow believer of ours who lived a long time ago, Noah Webster published the first American dictionary of the English language in 1828.
I have a reproduction copy of that dictionary, and it comes in very handy at times like this. Brother Webster defines apostasy as follows.
Apostasy is an abandonment of what one has professed, a total desertion or departure from one's faith or religion.
[3:04] Webster goes on to define what an apostate is when he uses this description. An apostate is one who has forsaken the church, sect, or profession to which he before adhered.

It applies to one who once believed, but now has become false and traitorous. As our lesson develops, we're going to see that these definitions are spot on, as our British friends like to say.
John MacArthur, in his commentary, suggested an alternative title that I think is also spot on. He calls this portion of Scripture the tragedy of getting over it.
And these are all very good. But I thought I would weigh in with my own definition, not that it carries any weight. An apostate is someone who has heard the gospel, who understands at least in a rudimentary sense, the claims of Christ.
The apostate has joined and to an extent involved himself with the church.
[4:38] Initially, initially, an apostate may appear to be enthusiastic about church membership. Then for whatever reason, probably a whole list of reasons, the apostate cools to the claims of Christ and cools concerning participation in the church.

often the cost of being a legitimate follower of Christ is too demanding and they leave. Now, leaving is not difficult when your commitment of faith was at best superficial.
In other words, it was easy to get over the gospel with a superficial relationship with Jesus. But how can we ultimately know that a person has entered into apostate and become an apostate?
God gives us a passage of inspired Scripture that are written in concrete for all to see. It is found in the first epistle of John.
He wrote three epistles, remember. He wrote Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, and Revelation.
And we find this in 1st John, chapter 2, verse 19, they went out from us, but they were not of us.
[6:16] For if they'd been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they are all not of us.

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As this passage points out to us, many apostates do not like Christ, do not like the church, and ultimately they leave.
But, and this is my opinion, I think a greater problem are those apostates inside the church, that opt to remain, and spread seeds of discord within the church body.
Rather than do that, and risk dividing the church, or even leading a denomination into error, it would be much better if they departed.
Now there's another reason that a lesson on apostasy and apostates is timely. It is spoken of in the Word of God as an end times event.
[7:38] The Lord Jesus, in fact, addresses this truth with His followers in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 24, beginning in verse 3.

As He said on the Mount of Olives, that's Jesus, the disciples came to Him privately saying, tell us when these things will be and what will be the sign of Your coming, Your return, and of the end of the age.
And Jesus answered them, see that no one leads you astray. Many will come in My name saying, I am the Christ.
And they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed for this must take place.
But the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.
[8:54] All these things are but the beginning of birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death and you will be hated by all nations. for My namesake.

And then many, listen to this, and then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.
That's God in human flesh talking there. And I always found it interesting that Jesus said that many are going to come in My name saying I'm the Messiah.
I'm the Christ. When I was an FBI agent, we had the horrible thing down in South America with Jim Jones where he ordered his 900 followers to drink poison Kool-Aid and feed it to their children.
And all but four did. I missed going on that just by that much. They didn't realize my background was a homicide detective in Fort Worth and they said if we'd brought that up in your profile, we would have sent you down.
[10:11] They sent a bunch of FBI agents down there. I was never sad I didn't get to go or have to go. But at that time, it was estimated there were 1,600 men in America telling people they were Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

1,600. Now the Apostle Paul makes reference to the falling away in the end times in 1 Timothy 4.1.
Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.
But really, the definitive statement on falling away of apostates in the end times is found in 2 Thessalonians. This is from the English Standard Version in 2 Thessalonians 2.3.
Let no one deceive you in any way for that way will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed the son of destruction.
[11:32] The New American Standard Version of that passage says no one is to deceive you in any way for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed the son of destruction and the King James is similar let no man deceive you by any means for that day shall not come except for come a falling away first and the man of sin be revealed the son of perdition.

And there are two verses in Jude it's pretty easy to find because there's only one chapter in Jude verses 3 and 4 and Jude tells us he's the half brother of Jesus beloved although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints for certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ Christ and the Bible mentions a number of individuals who actually during their sojourn on earth became apostates during their lifetime in the Old Testament one that stands out was Israel's first king
Saul the Lord said to Samuel about Saul the Lord said I regret that I've made Saul king for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments and Samuel was angry

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and he cried to the Lord all night the New Testament lists ones who stands out as the classic apostate in all 66 books and that is none other than Judas Iscariot he was a man exposed to the truth about God's grace he saw the Lord's mercy in action he saw love at a depth that most will never experience in this lifetime he was one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ followers ultimately
Judas rejected the truth that he had experienced first hand and walked away from Jesus and he didn't just walk away he walked into the waiting arms of the Pharisees and plotted with them how best they could arrest Jesus and bring him to trial for blasphemy and many people over the centuries have claimed they would be a follower of Christ if they had more evidence as to his claims I'm always amazed at that Judas is the contradiction to that belief system he was with truth and life incarnate for three years but he turned and walked away and is in the pit today where he will forever be and he's got to be saying to himself what did
I do I mean every moment what did I do so the truth concerning apostasy is ugly it is a defection from the truth more than that it is a defection from the truth bearer it is the intentional falling away or withdrawal from Christ and the truth he delivers to all who believe the Greek word pastua who trust who have faith who commit their lives now in one sense an apostate is in a class by himself and by the way let me inject something here it's not in your notes if you're worried about whether or not you're an apostate apostates don't worry that they're apostates okay if you're worried
[16:41] I just don't know if I'm saved I just don't know maybe I haven't done enough no you haven't done enough and you won't but people that aren't saved don't worry that they're not saved so let me let me just I throw that in for free I won't charge for that but the truth concerning apostasy is very ugly because it is a defection from the truth bearer the apostate is in a class all by himself he is heard at some level he has embraced the truth concerning Christ he may have been in church for some weeks months maybe some years he might be a Sunday school teacher a deacon an elder a pastor of a church but for whatever reason he walks away and I hope

I'm not stepping on very many toes in here I would think not but I would say in our day the best known apostate that I've heard on my machine at home is Andy Stanley son of the late Dr. Charles Stanley Andy is pastor of North Point Community Church in Metro Atlanta, Georgia I didn't realize that church has eight campuses in the Atlanta area and has attended every week by over 38,000 people you can't listen to Andy five minutes and not realize he's not preaching truth I've listened to some of his sermons just to learn he has totally embraced the LGBTQ and how many letters they have it changes every week however many letters are still in that thing but let me tell you what an apostate is not an apostate is not someone who has never heard or had a clear presentation or understanding of the gospel a tribal member in
Africa or Asia or South America that has never heard of Jesus may be dead in trespasses and sins because God gives all of us that God shaped void inside you can look up at the night sky and say there's someone more powerful than me but while they may be dead in trespasses and sins they are not an apostate that is reserved for those who hear understand at some level and later walk away well it only took 20 minutes but this leads us to our first verse verse 26 and only for if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins now as so often happens in God's word this one verse is packed with God's inspired truth our passage speaks of sinning deliberately other translations speak of willful sinning this is not speaking of a follower of
Christ committing a sin and immediately being labeled an apostate in fact if you read the first chapter of first John the Holy Spirit writing through the apostle John makes it clear that believers sin and if you ever say you don't sin you're lying and you're making God a liar because he says you sin he also gives you the key to forgiveness which is confession in 1 John 1 9 so he tells us how to deal with our sins to better understand this verse I appeal to Dr.
R.C. Sproul now with the Lord this is a footnote of his in his Reformation Bible it's a very good Bible Christians who claim to be sinless are self deluded and those who sin should not despair of grace the willful or deliberate sin here is abandoning one's confession altogether trampling the son underfoot treating his sacrificial blood as unclean and insulting God's gracious spirit the seriousness of the charge is indicated by its willingness and the measure of knowledge or enlightenment it refuses I also looked up a footnote in the MacArthur study Bible Dr.
[21:54] MacArthur says this the Greek term for sinning willfully carries the idea of deliberate intention that is habitual the sin is rejecting Christ deliberately these are not isolated acts the

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apostate is beyond salvation because he has rejected the only sacrifice that can cleanse him from sin and bring him into God's presence to turn away from that sacrifice leaves him no saving alternative now that would make some people very uncomfortable but I read a book by Dr.

MacArthur called How Saved Are You where he says look habitual sinning doesn't necessarily mean repeating the same sin we do that all too often but it's when it takes over your life becomes the number one thing in your life more than sitting under the preaching of the word more than Bible study more than prayer so there are two major characteristics of apostasy they are the knowledge of God's truth and the rejection of God's truth and that first characteristic deals with the knowledge of the truth of the gospel which is both known and understood here's a really profound statement so you know it didn't come from me originally every apostate is an unbeliever but not every unbeliever is an apostate

I thought that was pretty profound now I mentioned this earlier but every apostate has enough information concerning Christ and his gospel by which they can be saved it is when they reject that truth and walk away from it that they give ample witness that they've abandoned the only saving faith because they are apostate in Greek the language of the New Testament there are two primary words for knowledge talking about the knowledge of God's truth the first of these is gnosis we get the word gnostics because there's a G in front of that gnostics we get that word this type of knowledge has to do with gnosis in a general spiritual knowledge the other word used for knowledge in the New Testament is epinosis and that is the word used here in verse 26 this has reference to a deep or full knowledge this describes the person who has understanding who has the ability to exercise discernment the apostates described in

Hebrews 10 26 have much more than a passing knowledge of the gospel of Christ we would say these people know the gospel well we used to sit next to them in church we used to assume they were believers I'd even go buy them lunch if I'd known they weren't believers I'd let them by I didn't know they were apostates we've had people leave here over 40 plus years that Mike and I and others have been that just walked away from all of it I'm not to like people get mad and go join first methodist people walking away people who possess epinosis were depicted in Hebrews chapter 6 and we studied that months ago these are the ones who have once been enlightened tasted the heavenly gift and been made partakers of the Holy Spirit if you're not careful that sounds like a believer but you have to realize those are not salvation terms it's the only time it shows up in the in the

New Testament Hebrews 6 4 in other words these people had been exposed to truth at a high level had good understanding but never were genuinely committed to Christ and they walked away and tried to take people with them they like doing that another way to say this is apostates breathe in the brilliant light of close proximity to the Lord Jesus Christ they live in the presence of Christ and come from within the church they blend in with God's people for a time they dwell in the presence of God's people and for a time are indistinguishable from them so the first characteristic of an apostate is that they know God's truth but along the way something happens something happens and they ultimately reject

[27:08] God's truth I called that truth rejected I think that fits once truth is known the apostate will ultimately reject the same so the second characteristic of an apostate is that truth is rejected it may take weeks months even years but the apostate will fall away John MacArthur has on his wall his ordination certificate five ministers that quizzed him questioned him one of those died an apostate and John said all evidence to the country is in hell in fact he not only turned he became an alcoholic and when they went into his home he had died of alcohol poisoning and he torn out every page of his bible and used it in the bathroom there was excrement all over it and he signed

John's ordination certificate I don't know if John rubbed it out or not I don't think he did another way to say this is they do dwell in the presence of God's people but they reject truth so that's the second characteristic of an apostate truth rejected usually the apostate gives up even admits they don't believe anymore and they go their own way they return to a life of sinning willingly habitually it may be a gradual process but eventually the rejection of saving grace will manifest itself the word willfully there in Greek carries with it the idea of deliberate intention that is habitual in other words these are not sins that are done out of ignorance or weakness and we all have those don't we these are sins that are planned out and committed deliberately with much forethought such a life will eventually reject

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God and forsake His grace now I'm not saying that there are two types of people in the church those who sin and those who do not we all sin and fall short of the glory of God I'm not like you guys brothers I've never fulfilled the greatest commandment or the second greatest commandment I've never fulfilled love God with all and love your neighbors yourself but we all sin and fall short the meaning in the Greek language to John in 1 John is this the true believer does not sin continually or habitually John said this if we take a literal Greek translation the true believer does not continually sin continually that's what it says in that Greek language but all believers sin why do we do that well we got to remember something when we were saved we were still clothed in unredeemed flesh and the battle we fight internally is very real and can be very intense and brothers if you're fighting any battles you're not alone trust me you're not alone 90% of brothers in
Christ fight spiritual battles every day and the other 10% lie about it because they don't want their wives to know Diane and I prayed quite a bit together not as much as Mike and Marsha probably and I'll say things like thank you Lord I know I did I confessed to you last night and I know that you forgave me and my sin and thank you and then when we're through Diane says what sin and then I make a quote from Miss Daisy Miss Daisy that's me and Mr.
Worthen I don't I'm not going to discuss that with her but all believers sin all of believers lapse into sin and loathe it but the apostate sinner leaps into sin and loves it when believers sin we are convicted of it by the indwelling spirit of God and we do not want to stay away permanently sin does rob us for a season of joy and peace and many other blessings but it does not rob us of salvation if we are genuinely saved now you should know by now I fully embrace the doctrines of grace including divine election but you should also know from my teaching that we are never to try and determine who the elect are we don't have a clue we preach to every creature and like Spurgeon said if one of them gets saved
[32:51] I say well that guy was one of the elect but let me pass this over not only do we not try to determine who the elect are we don't try to determine who the apostates are because we'll get it wrong and if we get it wrong we create havoc in the church we can't determine who they are now we know from lifestyle there's something wrong but we can't see the heart and we're incapable of distinguishing a true believer that's lapsed into sin and the apostate unbeliever that's the Lord's business and we should never intrude into what is exclusively his Jesus said that in the church there would be wheat true believers and there's going to be tares false converts and he went on and said don't pull up the tares because in the process you're going to destroy some of the wheat and Jesus was very clear on that but there is a test we can take and everyone should take it it'll help you determine am I apostate or just living a sinful life it's an internal test we get it from the apostle Paul writing by inspiration who says examine yourselves 2nd corinthians chapter 13 verse 5 test yourself to see if you're in the faith examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus

Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test that's a verse worth memorizing we're actually to go through self examination many times in our Christian life for instance we're to do that every time we come to the Lord's table for communion spend time with the Lord do it on Saturday night if you know we're going to be taking communion on Sunday examine yourself that is where we come face to face with the reality or the unreality of salvation Paul really nails the difference between an apostate and a Christian living in sin in his second letter to Timothy verses 12 and 13 if we deny Jesus he will deny us apostates deny Christ eventually but if we are faithless just our faith just diminishes!
He remains faithful to us why? because he cannot deny himself and he said I'll never leave you and I'm never going to forsake you ultimately the apostate will willingly deny Christ at the judgment Christ will deny knowing them remember Matthew 7 where Jesus said I never knew you but even if the believer falls short in faith Christ will remain faithful based upon the promises he's given to indwell us abide with us through thick and thin so the two major characteristics of apostasy are a sufficient knowledge of the gospel to be saved and a willful and habitual denial of God in spite of such knowledge well what are the causes of apostasy what causes a person in the church to display many of the attributes of a safe person may even convince themselves that they are saved only to later abandon the faith and walk away well that's an interesting question and it's certainly worth exploring next time
Thank you.

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