

APOSTATES, WHO ARE THEY?

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Introduction

I don't know what you think about the word "apostate" but to me it sounds ugly. I don't like the word at all. Nor do I believe that the Lord likes the word "apostates" either.

The main reason I am writing this book is because of a false doctrine that has been taught for many years and is still being published throughout the world. I am referring to the false doctrine of "Once saved, always saved".

It is my intent to refute this false doctrine and I will do so using the Word of God; His book that is called "The Bible".

Webster's dictionary definition of "apostasy" is: "**APOS'TASY**, n. [Gr. a defection, to depart.] 1. An abandonment of what one has professed; a total desertion, or departure from one's faith or religion. And he defines "apostates" with these words: "**APOS'TATE**, n. [Gr.] One who has forsaken the church, sect or profession to which he before adhered. In its original sense, applied to one who has abandoned his religion; but correctly applied also to one who abandons a political or other party."

If you have been a member of the Lord's church I am sure that you have been a witness to one person [maybe more] who has abandoned, defected or departed from the fellowship of the brethren. This is called "apostasy".

I feel sure that some will say that Mr. Webster's word does not make one an apostate". I would certainly agree with that but the words of God does say that those who have sinned have fallen from grace. I want you to understand that I do not put my trust in what man says; therefore, I will be referring to what God has to say about those who have obeyed the truth but have abandoned or departed from what they once believed. This is too serious of a subject to place your trust in the words and doctrine of anybody; but we can certainly trust what the Almighty God tells us.

I don't even ask that you trust what I will write about this subject or any other subject. However, if I give you book, chapter and verse I do ask you to trust what the Lord tells you.

I am aware that some will say; "Christians do not become "apostates". I am afraid that I would have to rephrase that and say; "Christians should not become "apostates". If we are perfectly honest with ourselves we will admit that Christian do things that they should not do; some even go so far as to completely abandon their faith, the church and the Lord.

Are you an apostate? Let us find out by going to our Bibles.

God's Word Describes an Apostate

In the Old Testament Moses wrote about certain people who had “gone out from among you” (Deuteronomy 13:13) “*Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known;*” The word “Belial” is rendered wicked. The word means “worthlessness.” Some commentators render the word “Belial”: “lawless men; - persons good for nothing to themselves or others and capable of nothing but mischief.” We can learn more about them by reading these scriptures: (Judges 19:22) “*Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him.*” (1 Samuel 1:16) “*Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.*” This one did not even want to be recognized as “a daughter of Belial.” (1 Samuel 25:25) “*Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.*” It appears as though their reputation went before them. We need to be in constant awareness that our reputation will go ahead of us; keeping this in mind should help; or prevent us from sin. An important lesson about “these children of Belial” is that at one time they had been numbered among the children of Israel; if they had not been numbered with them how could they have possibly gone out from among the children of Israel? [Cf. Deuteronomy 13:13] When they left they became apostates!

In the New Testament the writer of the Hebrews epistle wrote: (Hebrews 3:12) “*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*” Please notice to whom the Hebrews writer is addressing these words. The way I read this he is addressing “brethren” in other words he is writing to Christians. The writer must have had some fear that there were those who either had or were on the verge of “departing from the living God.” If the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved” is true would it not be impossible for anyone to “depart from the living God?” If someone departs from God they would be doing the complete opposite of Hebrews 4:16 “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*” Let us remember if we depart from God, He will depart from us. Think about what Jesus said to those who work iniquity: (Matthew 7:23) “*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from*

me, ye that work iniquity.” No doubt you can find some sad words in the Bible but these words spoken by Jesus have to be among some of the saddest.

If you think you can “depart from the living God” and not suffer the consequences I recall that God delivered the children of Israel out of bondage and promised them a land “of milk and honey; but because of disobedience they fell short of that reward. God has promised Christians eternal life in heaven; but if we disobey by “departing” we too shall fall short of that reward. Just like the children of Israel we too have been rescued from bondage; we have been freed from the bondage of sin; let us never be held in bondage to sin again: (Galatians 5:1) *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”*

We need to ask; “What is it that would cause anyone to “depart from the living God?” I would refer you once again to Hebrews 3:12 *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.”* It is “an evil heart of unbelief” that causes one to depart. The word “unbelief” is used to qualify the word “heart.” The cause of their “unbelief” was a lack of confidence in God. Today those who profess that a Christian cannot be lost have placed their confidence in what man says and allowed their confidence in God to fade. An “evil heart of unbelief” led to the first apostasy and it will lead to every apostasy until the end of the world. In a marriage between a husband and a wife there has to be confidence and faith between the two; God requires the same confidence and faith; we must never doubt that God will do what He says He will do; God cannot lie: (Titus 1:2) *“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;”* The only way we can have “hope of eternal life” is to remain faithful: (Revelation 2:10) *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”* Today is October 10, 2008 and many have little or no confidence in the stock market and banks due to recent failures of banks and the tumble to the stock market; no doubt many are lying awake at nights unable to sleep because they have no confidence that their money will be there when they need it. I would think that it would be hard to find sleep if one has no confidence in God. I trust the Lord when he said that if I was faithful he would give me “a crown of life.” I also trust that if I depart from Him He will depart from me. The danger of apostasy can surely be seen.

What Causes Apostasy?

As already stated “an evil heart of unbelief” is the cause for many to depart [Hebrews 3:12]. But we should be aware that there are other causes; persecution will cause some to depart from the “living God”: (Matthew 24:9-10) *“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. (10) And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.”* I remember back in the 1950’s when there was a fear of the Communist a young preaching saying he thought he could withstand any persecution but he was not sure what he would do if he were to see his wife and family to be abused. Persecution has caused many to depart. Peter told Jesus that he would never forsake him; but Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. Think back to the days of Moses; when things weren’t going well for the children of Israel they forsook Moses and they even said it would be better if they were back in Egypt. Again I say; “We must be faithful until death [Revelation 2:10]. Peter and the children of Israel had no root or confidence in the Lord; Jesus taught in a parable that those who have no root will “fall away”: (Luke 8:13) *“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”* We must be firmly rooted in the Word of God or there is always the danger of falling away.

New Christians are the most apt to “depart from the living God” because they have not had time for the roots to develop in the Word of God. An example of this can be found in the Bible, the case I am thinking of is Simon the sorcerer. He fell away: (Acts 8:18-19) *“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, (19) Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.”* Peter immediately rebuked Simon: (Acts 8:20-21) *“But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. (21) Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”* I know that there are some who would say; “Simon was not really saved”. But what do the scriptures say about Simon’s salvation? (Acts 8:13) *“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”* Question; “What did Jesus say one has to do to be saved?” (Mark 16:16) *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* According to Luke who was inspired to write the book of Acts Simon had complied with what Jesus declared was essential to obtain salvation; Simon was saved. Some will imply that Simon was not really

converted; I believe Simon had been converted because Acts 8:13 informs us that Simon “continued with Philip; I can’t believe that Simon would have followed Philip if he had not been converted. This is a simple case of a Christian who “departed from the living God.” Was Simon eternally lost? Did Simon have to be baptized again? The answer to both questions is NO; Peter told Simon what he must do: (Acts 8:22) “*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*”

The Bible also records another Christian who “departed from the living God.” This man had been a co-worker with the apostle Paul. (2 Timothy 4:9-10) “*Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: (10) For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.*” Paul urges Timothy to come to him as soon as possible. It is not certain why Paul wanted Timothy by his side; perhaps he wanted to give Timothy some counseling or he may have wanted Timothy by his side when he died. Verse 10 begins by naming the man who had “forsaken” Paul. Demas is honorably mentioned in Colossians 4:14 “*Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*” This was written when Paul was a prisoner at Rome. Except for these two verses the Bible reveals nothing else about Demas. But we are told that he was with Paul when he wrote Colossians and Paul regarded him with enough respect to include Demas in his greeting. But in Paul’s epistle to Timothy we learn some sad news about Demas; he had “forsaken” Paul. In this point of Paul’s life he desperately needed a friend which could explain the urgency of his desire for Timothy to come to him.

In 2 Timothy 2:10 Paul states the reason for Demas “forsaking” him; he wrote that Demas “loved this present world.” Some commentators say that this means Demas was fearful for his life and forsook Paul in an effort to live; it is true that by this time it had become extremely dangerous to be a Christian. Others say the meaning is that Demas loved the Jews and their way of life more than he loved Christianity or that he loved the Jews more than he loved the Gentiles. I doubt that Demas forsook Paul for secular gain; he surely counted this cost before he began to labor with Paul as he could see how Paul’s welfare was going; working with his own hands as a tent maker. I feel Demas felt it unsafe to be seen as a Christian; therefore he forsook Paul and in an effort to save his life he also forsook Christianity. To put it in simple words Demas’ love for Christ and the gospel was forgotten and forsaken.

Christians today are in danger of “loving this present world”; maybe not for fear of what might danger our wellbeing but because we get caught up with the allurements of the world. The bright lights and good times get the best of many

Christians and causes them to forget Christ and their love of the gospel; resulting in forsaking Christ and his church.

John writes of others who “went out from us” (1 John 2:19) *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”* The “us” that John refers to would not be the apostles as John was the only apostle still living when John wrote this; so he must be referring to himself and other Christians! Those who “went out from us” are brethren who were in the church and of the same mind as was John; at least in profession. If they were not in the church it could NOT be said that “they went out.” I tend to disagree with others who say they were not true believers. You will find some of these today who claim to be Christians and they are only pretending to be Christians. To be blunt they are hypocrites; there were hypocrites in the days of Jesus: (Mark 7:6) *“He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”* Jesus said the people of his days “honored” and praised him with their mouths but their “hearts were far from him. It is highly possible that there were such people in John’s days and he is writing about hypocrites also; but I have serious doubts that all who “went out” from them were just pretending to be Christians. We may not want to admit it but we have hypocrites in our age also and for this cause we also see some “going out from us.”

If the Bible records so many occurrences of those who fell away for many different reasons why do we have those today who insist that you cannot fall from grace? It just is not is the truth.

Not Everyone Becomes An Apostate

We are given encouragement from the book of Psalms: (Psalms 44:18) *“Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;”* While the Bible does tell of some who have fallen away it also tells us about some who didn’t fall away. The Psalmist says our hearts are not turned back to being blind, to its former folly, to fulfilling the lusts and desires of the flesh nor is their hearts turned away from God. We should continue in love and faith in Him; we should continue to serve and worship Him. The trials that they faced had no influence on them and they were not caused to apostatize. Aren’t these encouraging words? Falling into idolatry was the greatest danger at this time. You might want to read the entire 44th chapter of Psalms as it gives a complete description of the nation. In Psalms 44:1-8 God had put them in possession of the land by His own power, not their own power. In verses 9-16 their present state is recounted. In

verses 17-22 they are killed all the day long and are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Finally in verse 23-26 they make an appeal for God's mercy.

The writer of Hebrews wrote that "better things were expected" of the Hebrew believers: (Hebrews 6:9) "*But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*" Notice the affection he has for them; he calls them "beloved." They were also loved by the Lord not because they were descendants of Abraham; but because of their obedience to the gospel. Because of their background they knew God and the prophecies of Jesus better than the Gentiles. Better things was expected of them; it would be most dreadful if they should fall away and become apostates. He expected them to remain faithful and continue in the "things that accompany salvation". It seems as though he is trying to excite their diligence and to discourage apostasy. Could it be that the Hebrew writer is setting an example for us; that we too should encourage one another to remain faithful and not to become apostates? He writes more encouraging words: (Hebrews 10:39) "*But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*" Here the writer concludes that he has the fullest confidence that those to whom he is writing will not fall away thusly becoming apostates. It is my prayer that he could be able to write the same words to you and me.

Can An Apostate Be Restored?

Again I refer to the words of Hebrews: (Hebrews 6:4-6) "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, (5) And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, (6) If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*" This passage is the subjected of much controversy and of many different opinions among the Christian world. Some say that this only applies to those who were not truly converted while others imply that this passage is referring to those who have been truly converted to Christianity. Surely the Hebrews writer was addressing true Christians as it is to the Christians that he writes to in this epistle. The purpose for these words was to awaken the true Christians and to warn them of the dangers of apostasies. If he was writing to those who were unconverted the exhortation would be to be converted. I have serious doubts that he would have told anyone who was not converted that it would be impossible for them to be converted and to be saved; that simply is not a message of the gospel as the gospel is for everyone and especially for the unbeliever, that is the gospel is for those who are lost and facing death yet uncon-

verted. On the other hand it is extremely difficult to bring those back who have rejected the gospel; what could we tell them that they have not already heard?

Let us remember that there are many things that are impossible for man but are possible for God; do you recall what Jesus said? (Mark 10:27) *“And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.”* (Mark 14:36) *“And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”* Was not David restored? Was not Peter who denied Jesus restored when he repented. It is not our work to forgive sin [unless someone has sinned against us]; neither have we been given the power to restore anyone back to the grace of God; we can encourage but it is God who has power that man does not possess.

Wayne Jackson has a good article in the Christian Courier entitled “Are Apostates from the Faith beyond Repentance”? I shall share some of his thoughts.

“The book of Hebrews is replete with warnings to Jewish Christians who were in danger of falling from the faith. For instance, the recipients of the letter were warned against “drifting away” from the truths they had learned regarding the Lord Jesus-which truths had been confirmed by miraculous phenomena [2:1-4]. The Hebrews were urged not to listen to those influences that denied the identity of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, and who were attempting to corrupt their faith, leaving them only with evil hearts of unbelief-should they grant these teachers a sympathetic ear [3:12]. They were warned not to follow the destructive course of some of their ancestors, who succumbed to weaknesses, and so were not allowed to enter the rest Jehovah had prepared for them [4:1ff].”

“A consideration of the latter portion of chapter 5, and the initial segment of chapter 6, reveals that many of these Hebrew Christians had become stagnant in the service to Christ.”

Brother Jackson then asks the question; “Were these people genuine Christians?”

“Because so many within the protestant community are wedded to the Calvinistic dogma of “eternal security” artful maneuvers of exegetical gymnastics are frequently employed in attempting to establish the notion that the subject of this rebuke are not genuine Christians, They were only “professors” not real; “confessors”. Because as one writer asserts: “True Christians do not (i.e., cannot) apostatize’ [Hagner, 93; cf. Hodges, 794].”

“But carefully notice the specificity with which these “brethren” [cf, 3:13] are described [6:4,5]. (1) They once were “enlightened,” thus had left the realm of darkness [cf. Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18]. (2) They had “tasted the heavenly gifts” If the “gift” was not salvation [cf. Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8,9], what was it? (3) These

people had been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit” [cf. 3:1,14]. Does not this mean that they belonged to Christ [cf. Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6]? (4) The Hebrews had “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” It is only by the most deceitful handling of the word of God [cf. 2 Cor. 4:2] that the obvious conclusion, namely that those addressed in this epistle were *bona fide* Christians, can be denied. They were children of God in spite of the fact that they had not grown to the point that was expected of them.”

Brother Jackson’s next point is; “What is the plight of one who has known and experienced the lovely blessings detailed in verses 4-5, and then he defects? What is his spiritual status should he “fall away”? And “fall away” from what? From the grace that had been bestowed upon them [cf. 12:15; Gal. 5:4]. The answer to the question is this: “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance.” The phrase is frightening. It sounds so bleak. It is bleak! It is an “impossible” endeavor. The word “impossible” derives from the Greek *adunatos*, literally “without power.” Note the word’s use elsewhere in this letter [6:18; 10:4; 11:6]. Any attempt to weaken the term is an exercise in futility. But, as our original question suggested, the passage does seem to conflict with so many other biblical texts that lavishly describes the unfathomable love and mercy of our wonderful and benevolent Maker. How is one to reconcile this seeming difficulty?”

“The key to the solution is to be found in the following phrase. The American Standard Version renders it as follows: “seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” The ASV footnote has it: “the while they crucify....” The English Standard Version reads like this: since they are crucifying once again....” The translators are attempting to give the English reader a hint as to the force of the original text. Here are some important grammatical facts. (1) Both the expressions “crucify” and “put him to open shame” are present tense participles. In Greek the present tense has more to do with the type of action, rather than time [the latter being secondary]. It is an action that is in progress, and generally, one that is sustained. The “crucifying” and “putting to open shame,” therefore, represent on-going actions on the part of apostates. (2) It is also important to note that present participles normally express action that is contemporary with that of the main verb of the sentence [Wallace, 625], which, in this case is “renew.” In other words, “while they continue to crucify,” “as long as they are “crucifying,” the Son of God, they cannot be brought to repentance.”

“Why is this the case? Because Christ is the motive for repentance! How could one possibly repent of falling away from the Christian faith, if he believes that the crucifixion of Jesus was a just sentence upon a false Messiah? As F.F. Bruce expressed it: “Those who repudiate the salvation procured by Christ will find it none anywhere else [149].”

Jackson concludes his article with these words. “And so, it is not the case that Jewish Christians who abandon the faith cannot ever be saved; the tragic reality is this: they cannot be saved if they drift into a state of unbelief and remain that way! But, as Blackwelder observes, the temporal participles imply that “if persons guilty of such sin will cease it, and repent, they can be reclaimed” [104].”

What About Punishment For The Apostates?

The Lord will surely find them guilty: (Zephaniah 1:4-6) *“I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; (5) And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the LORD, and that swear by Malcham; (6) And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor inquired for him. Judah had gone in the ways of Egypt and they had sinned worse than Egypt. “The mighty hand and stretched out arm that had once delivered Judah will once again be stretched out; but not for her but against her. Because they had ‘fallen away’ God was going to exert His mighty power against them. Jerusalem is named here because Jerusalem was the metropolis, the royal seats of kings of the house of David and where the temple of the Lord was along with the ark, the altar, where priest sacrificed and where people worshipped. It is indeed a fearful thing to have the “mighty hand and out stretched arm of the Lord” to be turned against you; this is the fate that apostates can expect.*

The Hebrews writer gives us the very same warning” (Hebrews 10:25-31) *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (26) For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, (27) But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (28) He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: (29) Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. (31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. In verse 26*

we find the phrase “if we sin wilfully” is not to be understood as a single sin but of continual course of sins. This is making reference to sins which are done with purpose and intent. Sinners such as this are to be fearful of judgment when sentence and condemnation will be passed upon them. It is referred to as “fiery indignation” such as that that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. Thereby, describing the utter destruction from the presence of God. The message from God is that “vengeance” belongs to Him, He will repay. What is implied here? One word explains what is meant; that word is PUNISHMENT! The truth of the matter is the purity, the holiness and the justice of God causes Him to hate sin and He will “recompense.”

To “fall into the hands of the living God” can be viewed in two senses. First we remember that the hand of God created man, takes care of man and has provided a means of salvation. But here the message is entirely different; here we are to feel the weight of His justice against sinners and we are to have fear of displeasing God when we face Him at the judgment bar. May I remind you of the duration of punishment for the sinner; it won’t be for just an hour, a day, a week or not even for a year. We are talking about eternity; there will be no end to the punishment that awaits the sinner.

However, in the same chapter we find some encouraging words: (Hebrews 10:39) *“But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”* To those who do not apostatize there is hope of salvation and eternal life. These words should encourage us and strengthen us to the point where we are able to withstand the fiery darts of Satan: (Ephesians 6:16) *“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”* We may be called upon to stand against some very difficult situations; but as Paul wrote here if we use the “shield of faith” we will be enabled to “quench” [I.e. put out or smother out] “the fiery darts of Satan. This is true because as the writer of Hebrews wrote “we are not of them” that fall away.

Here is what the apostle Peter wrote concerning those who “have forsaken the right way” and “have gone astray”: (2 Peter 2:15-17) *“Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; (16) But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet. (17) These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.”* Religion is often represented as a straight path; to go astray is to forsake the “right way!” Instead of following the straight and narrow path they are now walking down a crooked road that leads to destruction: (Luke 3:4) *“As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,*

make his paths straight.” (Hebrews 12:13) *“And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”* So with so much emphasis being put on walking down the straight path there is little wonder that Peter said they had “gone astray.” These people that Peter writes of had once professed the Christian faith; they had at one time lived the Christian life, but they had gone “astray”. There are a lot of sad statements that are found in the Bible and the words of Peter that we find here I would list among them.

The right way is the way of truth, the way of the gospel, the way of the Lord and of course the way of Christ. This is true because Christ is “the way”: (John 14:6) *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”* If one has “gone astray” from “the way, the truth” they cannot and will not “come unto the Father; as following Jesus is the only way that leads to the Father. Jesus once warned about entering the wrong gate and walking down the wrong path: (Matthew 7:13-14) *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to*

destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: (14) Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” In verse 14 Jesus makes another statement that I would list among the sad statements of the Bible “few there be that find it” [I.e, few there be that find the way to eternal life]. As the case with Peter’s message they had entered the right gate and started to walk down the right path but then they went “astray” and began to walk down that “broad way that leads to destruction”. This once again proves that it is possible to “fall from grace” and in the words of Jesus they are headed for destruction,

What Caused Them To Go Astray?

What was it that caused them to apostatize? What was it that caused them to change their course of life? What was it that caused them to go “astray”? Peter explains it this way: (2 Peter 2:20-22) *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. (21) For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. (22) But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.* There is no question as to whether Peter is writing of those who at one time had been faithful Christians because he wrote

that they had “escaped the pollutions of the world through knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The “pollutions of the world” are the sins of the world; it seems as though mankind is addicted to sin. The “pollutions of the world” may also be properly called the “lusts of the world”; which are instruments that Satan uses to allure and trap us. Peter is writing about those who had obeyed the gospel and became Christians. He then gives a couple of illustrations of their actions; he says they are like a dog and a sow; they turned back to the pollutions of the world. In other words they went astray and fell from grace and walking down the path that leads to destruction.

Apostasy Shall Abound In The Latter Days

Jesus gave warning of what would happen in the latter days; after the church was established: (Matthew 24:9-12) *“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake. (10) And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. (11) And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. (12) And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”* Peter declared to the crowd on the Day of Pentecost that the “last days” had come according to the prophecy of Joel: (Acts 2:17) *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:”* Much later Paul wrote these words to Timothy 2 Timothy 3:1 *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.”* It is safe to say that Peter and Paul were persuaded that they were in the last days. The Hebrews writer wrote by inspiration that the “last days” had come: (Hebrews 1:2) *“Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;”* These are the words of James concerning the “last days”: (James 5:3) *“Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.”* Nothing has changed; we remain in the “last days” today! The “last days” that these inspired writers wrote of will continue until our Lord and Savior comes again.

A good question that can be asked is “What will transpire in the last days?” Paul wrote to Timothy exactly what would happen in the “last days”: (1 Timothy 4:1-3) *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; (2) Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot*

iron; (3) *Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.*” It should be noticed that this is not what Paul expected to happen; these are the words of the Holy Spirit of God. What I am saying is that this prophecy was not of human conjecture it came from the Spirit of God as all true prophecy is revealed. John, the last apostle to live had seen those who apostatized because of the antichrist: (1 John 2:18) *“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”* If you don’t believe that we have antichrists in our world today that will make every efforts to draw you away from Christ you are badly mistaken. As long as the world continues to be in existence we shall have the antichrist and those who will fall from grace. Since the days of the apostles until the present day we have those who lie in wait to deceive men with deceitful words. Paul says they will teach doctrines such as those devised by devils. I would even go so far as to say they are murdering the souls of men. We should be aware of false doctrines and be on constant guard.

One mistake that is commonly made is that this would occur just before the end of the world. Friends it was happening when Paul and others wrote about this apostasy and it is still taking place today.

Those who contend that it is impossible once you are saved you are always saved and cannot fall from grace must have never read 1 Timothy 4:1. Of course they say that those who fall away weren’t true Christians to start with. But I as have pointed out earlier Simon the sorcerer was truly converted and he fell; their theory simply does not hold water.

Apostasy Exemplified

Going back to the Old Testament we read about Amaziah: (2 Chronicles 25:14) *“Now it came to pass, after that Amaziah was come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir; and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them.”* Amaziah had just had a great victory over the Edomites and you would think that he would give glory and thanks to God; instead he brought false gods and went so far as to bow down and burn incense before them. This is nothing else but apostasy. We are assured that he did in fact turn way from God: (2 Chronicles 25:27) *“Now after the time that Amaziah did turn away from following the LORD they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish: but they sent to Lachish after him, and slew him there.”*

Turning to the New Testament we find those who turned away from following Jesus: (John 6:66) *“From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”* This wouldn’t include the twelve nor would it include the seventy for their names are written in heaven. Prior to this there were multitudes of disciples following Jesus; the language of this verse tells me that they did not repent and begin to follow Jesus once again because it is said that they “walked with him no more.” This is common with apostates today; they fall away and “walk with him no more.”

We learn of two who became apostates from the writings of Paul: (1 Timothy 1:19-20) *“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: (20) Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”* Verse 19 says nothing about the grace of God; as God’s grace is still available to them if they will repent. It is their faith that has become “shipwrecked”. Let us remember that the apostle Paul was “shipwrecked three times and he was saved each time; those who have made their faith “shipwrecked” can also be saved if they will repent. The problem that we encounter in trying to restore them is they distance themselves from us, won’t talk to us or get mad if we try to encourage them to come back; I know this from personal experience I have had in trying to restore the erring. In verse 20 Paul names two; Hymenaeus and Alexander. The first of these two men is mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:17 *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;”* The word “canker” is better rendered gangrene; gangrene gnaws and eats at the flesh and will destroy the whole body if not tended to. Apostasy will destroy the soul if not tended to. Hymenaeus and Philetus were among the chief of those who were spreading false teachings; if they were not stopped they could possibly destroy the whole church; in similar fashion as gangrene destroys the body. Referring back to 1 Timothy the second man mentioned is Alexander; he was a coppersmith who did “much evil” to Paul: (2 Timothy 4:14 *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:”* Because they had become apostates what did Paul do? Let’s look at verse 20 again: (1 Timothy 1:20) *“Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.”* What had they done that would cause Paul to enforce such drastic action? It seems as though Hymenaeus had denied the resurrection of Jesus: (2 Timothy 2:17-18 *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; (18) Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”* As stated earlier such false teaching would possibly destroy the church; if not the entire church

certainly the souls of anyone who would give them an ear. Paul's action was certainly justified. Whether or not they were brought back to Christ is not known.

Conclusion

Apostasy is certainly possible; the Bible proves this to be true. If not repented of apostasy will destroy the souls of all who shall fall away from the faith; the truth of the Word of God.

It is the duty of everyone who remains faithful to attempt to restore the erring: (Galatians 6:1) *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* All too often when someone leaves the church we make no attempt to bring them back. This is probably because in the back of our minds we are thinking they were never really saved. This idea comes from false teachers; this in no way is what the Bible teaches; the Bible says “restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” All too often when someone departs from the body of Christ we go to them and appear to be mad; this is not what the Bible teaches; it says go to them “in the spirit of meekness.”

It has been said if all the fallen were to be restored we would have to build larger buildings and to our shame this is probably true because we don't make an honest effort to restore those who are “overtaken in a fault.” Friends, I do not say this with emphasis on numbers; rather my concern and your concern should be on souls.

Let us admit that true Christians can go astray and when they do let us make every effort to bring them back!

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