

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

A Primer on Apostasy

Selected Passages

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PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: Apostasy is a subject found throughout the bible. Yet today it is often misunderstood or simply ignored. I believe that in the current state of celebrity pastors, vagueness in doctrine in the pulpit, and an embracing of a type of gospel-centeredness that borders more upon an inappropriate understanding of grace that is nothing less than licentiousness. Then, when someone suddenly departs from the “faith” there is a lot of head-scratching that occurs as to how that could happen. This sermon is designed to give a broad introduction to a doctrine that pervades the pages of Scripture.

Dismiss

I. Critical Prefaces.

- A. Is not the same as Church Discipline.
 - 1. The focus there is upon sin that is held onto by the professing Christian. The bible does not assume that when you made a profession of trust/faith that in fact you are definitely a believer.
 - 2. But it does teach us to embrace you as a believer assuming your profession is based on the actual gospel.
 - 3. Also, it instructs the church to then teach you sound doctrine and expect you to obey it. To grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - 4. Also it instructs the church to be holy. For the professing believer, to remain in unrepentant sin, requires the church to discipline you out as an unbeliever. In other words, you were to be viewed as an “almost-Christian.”
 - a. Examples of this would be:
 - b. Matthew 18:15ff
 - c. Titus 3:10-11.
- B. Old Testament history has apostasy be the norm. From the moment sin entered the world you have those who actively reject YHWH. Israel is the greatest example of this apostasy.

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1. The apostasy found in rejecting the promised land. This is picked up by the author of Hebrews.
 2. The apostasy repeated over and over in the Judges, each doing what was right in his own eyes.
 3. The apostasy of the splitting of the kingdoms. Where ten tribes abandon the priests, the temple, and the law.
 4. The apostasy of Judah.
- C. The beginning of Jesus' ministry is marked by consistent apostasy.
1. John 6:35-66.
 2. John 8:30-42.
- D. Jesus consistently spoke of apostasy.
1. Matthew 7:22ff.
 2. Matthew 24:11.
 - a. Notice how this is connected to the "last days."
 - (1) Acts 2:16 is the announcement of the last days, marked by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) 2 Peter 3:3-4.
 - (3) 1 Timothy 4:1-2
 - (4) 2 Thessalonians 3:1-4.
 - b. The culmination of apostasy will be just prior to the day of the Lord.
 - (1) This person is elsewhere described in Daniel.
 - (2) He is also described as the antichrist in Revelation. The revelation of the true Antichrist is the climax of these seemingly endless anti-christs that John writes of in his first letter.

II. **Key passages**

- A. Acts 20:25-32
- B. Romans 16:17-18

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1. Again these people exist to draw others away from the faith, through divisions and obstacles.
 2. In that sense, they are used by God to cleanse the church of too many false believers. But they are never looked upon in a favorable light.
- C. Galatians 1:6-9.
- D. 1 Timothy 1:18-20
1. Their faith is shipwrecked.
 2. Fierce wolves who rise up from the middle of the leaders to try to draw away disciples.
- E. 1 Timothy 1:6-7
1. They become fascinated with strange doctrines.
- F. 1 Timothy 4:1-3,7
1. They “depart” out from the faith (orthodoxy) by listening to false teachers.
- G. 2 Timothy 4:1-5.
- H. 1 John 2:17-20.
1. John makes a blatant frontal attack on those who are teaching false things in the church now. Up to now it has been contrasts between truth and error, now he openly calls them anti-christs.
 2. Notice in vs 17 this age/world is passing away. Now, in vs 18, the last hour has come.
 3. What stands out about the antichrist?
 - a. One has not come, seems to make him unique.
 - b. Also this antichrist is one of whom they have “heard.” It is part of the Christian message.
 - c. There seems to be a decent amount of anticipation in this person/being. Revelation 13 deals with this person,
 4. What about antichrists?
 - a. Many have appeared already. Because of that fact the reality that they are in the last hour is made true.

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- b. John Anderson made a real good observation when studying this text with me. “Whoever these persons are they are similar but distinct and subordinate from the antichrist just mentioned.”
- 5. John is the only one who uses this term, 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7.
 - a. The term literally means those who are opposed to Christ. This fits for anyone who comes with a false Christology and it underscores why we must have sound theology.
 - b. A right understanding of Christ **must** be taught for there can be no tolerance of anything less.
- I. Vs 19.
 - 1. Who is the primary focus here? [antichrists]
 - 2. What application about them can we make?
 - a. They went out from the midst of the church either through discipline or by open apostasy.
 - b. Note also the obvious purpose at the end of the verse.
 - c. While they were “of us” they looked like they really were, but only when they went out and remained out did they prove that they never, ever really were of us.
 - 3. What possible other applications?
 - a. A mark of a true Christian is that they remain “in the Church.”
 - b. One cannot separate being “in” the Church and being “in” Christ.
 - c. Belonging, truly belonging, to a local church is critical to one’s spiritual health and claim of faith.
 - d. This also gives weight to the idea of church membership, why?
 - (1) Because there assumes to be a way to know that a person is “of us.”
 - (2) And also assumes that there is a way to know that they are now not “of us.”
 - (3) And finally it assumes that if you are not “of us” in one place you are not “of us” in any place.

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4. 2 Peter 2:1-ff
 - a. 1:4-11 is the context. This flows from true prophetic word in vss 12ff.
 - b. “But” in 2:1. Note the harsh, building language that occurs to the end of the chapter.
5. The whole of Jude.
 - a. Again note the language—no pity.
 - b. The antidote in vss 20-21.
 - (1) Command is “keep yourself in the love of God.”
 - (2) The how is in the participles of vs 20 and 21.
 - (a) Notice it is keep yourself in sound doctrine.
 - (b) To pray in the Holy Spirit is not some silly ecstatic babbling, it is a prayer that is in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, meaning, in keeping with the will of the Holy Spirit rather than your own agenda.
 - (c) And live a life anticipating the return of Christ.
- J. The scary passages.
 1. Hebrews 2:1-2 is the first warning in this important book.
 2. Hebrews 3:7-19.
 - a. Quotes Psalm 95 that is a song of the failure of Israel in the Exodus.
 - b. Vs 12 now brings this warning to the readers of this letter, and to us.
 - c. The concern is that we are not diligent with our faith and the faith of others and people apostatize.
 - d. Note who is a partaker of Christ in this letter in vs 14.
 - e. Briefly discuss the “rest.” Three aspects found:
 - (1) The rest of God’s creative work (4:4, 10).
 - (2) The rest of Israel entering the promised land (3:11).

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(3) The rest that is referring to the Kingdom of God.

f. Vs 19 tells us that we will not enter that rest, meaning the eternal kingdom because of what reason [unbelief.]

K. Hebrews 6:4-8

1. Now he speaks of the real threat of apostasy again.

2. What is the main point in vss 4-6?

a. If you fall away it is impossible to be brought back to repentance.

b. This is key to grasp for anyone who will determine that a Christian, a true Christian, can lose their salvation.

c. If true, then there is no second opportunity. Which is completely contrary to what most positions hold to who believe in the loss of salvation and appeal to this passage and chapter 10.

3. AH gives six realities that proclaim one who is impossible to restore to repentance.

a. Professed repentance (4).

(1) They had to have professed this to desire to be renewed to it.

(2) 2 Corinthians 7:10 “true repentance does not have regret.”

b. “Have been enlightened”

(1) Used in John 1:9 of Jesus enlightening mankind.

(2) I see this as those who have been taught the gospel message, have given evidence that they have repented and understand it. They are not in the “dark” regarding what a Christian and what the gospel is.

c. “Tasted of the heavenly gift.”

(1) Some see this as the same as the Holy Spirit, but if you diagram it, it is a separate phrase.

(2) I see it as a taste of what a converted life and a forgiven life feels and looks like.

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- (3) They have participated in the community of believers and how redeemed people live and act.
- d. “Been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.”
 - (1) Here is the key one for anyone looking at this text.
 - (2) In some way or another these people have shared in the Holy Spirit.
 - (3) Here is my question:
 - (a) Born again? If so, no other place does a regenerate person become unregenerate.
 - (b) Baptism with the Holy Spirit? Then this would be one who is truly saved losing salvation.
 - (c) Filled with the Holy Spirit? Then this would fit.
- e. “Tasted of the good word of God.”
- f. “[Tasted] of the powers of the age to come.”
 - (1) This could be things such as miracles and wonders (2:4).
 - (2) But should also include a different way of living (Romans 14:17).
- 4. Summary of these:
 - a. They are all in the passive, these are things that have happened to them, or they passively experienced; rather than actively did themselves.
 - b. Key interpretive point is the illustration:
 - (1) land = professing Christian.
 - (2) drunk the rain = tasted [whatever]
 - (3) brings forth vegetation = practicing what you believe [good or bad].
 - (4) cf Matthew 13, the soils.

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- (5) The point of this section is that it is less important what you have experienced and more important on how you response (bear fruit) as a result of that experience.
 - (a) Matt 12:33.
- L. Hebrews 10:26-31.
 - 1. This is the starkest picture of the consequences of apostasy in this whole letter.
 - 2. What is the willful sinning?
 - a. It is the return to the Old Covenant practices as the way to be right before God.
 - b. Note that it is done with knowledge, not ignorance. The word means full knowledge.
 - c. But that would be the specific application. How would this look today?
 - (1) The answer is found in asking what is behind the willful return to the Old Covenant.
 - (2) At its core is a willful rejection of Jesus.
 - 3. Notice how he contrasts the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in vss 28-31.
 - a. Both brought a curse and a death without mercy.
 - b. But the image also is from lesser to greater.
 - c. You think it was bad to reject the Moses' law, what do you think it will be like to reject God's Son!?
 - d. To reject Jesus, to treat His sacrificial work as nothing, to essentially spit in the face of the Spirit, there is only one thing waiting for you—terror before the Lord.

III. **Conclusion.**

- A. Be on guard.
- B. Be ever growing in sound doctrine.
- C. Do not be friends with sin.

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- D. Place yourself in the care of tested and trusted elders/pastors.
- E. Gather for the purpose of spiritual encouragement with members of the church.
- F. But most of all, while not forgetting these things, do listen the declarations about Jesus made by the writer of Hebrews.
 - 1. In chapter 1 it is Jesus who upholds all things with his power and has made purification of sin.
 - 2. Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted. (Heb. 2:14-18)
 - 3. For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:12-16)
 - 4. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, (Heb. 5:8-9)
 - 5. but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the

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heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints a Son, made perfect forever. (Heb. 7:24-28)

6. And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (Heb. 9:27-28)
7. Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20-21)