

Apostasy

Revelation 3:14-22

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Provocative Question: Are we seeing a falling away from the faith as prophesied?

Why is the apostasy of the church controversial?

- We don't want to think we are part of an institution that is falling away from the faith.
- Compromising with the world's culture is the spirit of the age.

Why is it important to recognize the early onset of apostasy?

- It is necessary to our being an agent of change to make necessary course corrections for an organization.
- Such awareness helps us keep from succumbing to the spirit of the age and take action to grow closer to Jesus
- It helps us see how close we are to the fulfillment of the prophecies related to the Lord's return and thus gives us a sense of urgency to get on with His calling.

What is apostasy?

It is a falling away from the faith.

Let's look at a passage that tells us that apostasy is a sign of the times...

1 Tim 4:1-3 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

What are doctrines of demons?

Unbiblical doctrines that lure people away from Christ rather than toward Him.

What doctrines are you aware of that are from demons?

Salvation by works – you can lose your salvation – universalism – Mormonism (you can be as God) – Islam (Allah is just another name for God)

Gal 1:6-8 – *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, ⁷ which is not another; but there are*

some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

What does it mean to have your conscience seared?

You are so used to ignoring your conscience that it no longer reminds you of error. There is no longer any discernment.

What specific things are mentioned here that is a symptom of departing from the faith?

Forbidding to marry & commanding to abstain from certain foods.

How have we seen this?

- The Catholic Church started requiring priests to be celibate in the 11th century and became a formal part of canon law in 1917. Their forbidding eating any meat but fish on Fridays started in the U.S. in 1966.
- More recently, some have become vegetarians because they don't want to contribute to the "murder" of animals.

Why isn't eating meat Murder of animals?

God ordained it...

Gen 9:3 – *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.*

Are people losing their salvation when they fall away from the faith?

- No, they never had it to begin with. Professing to be a Christian doesn't make it so... you must be born again.
- Salvation is the work of God, not something we can do for ourselves. And God is not going to undo something He has done... Eternal Security is a true biblical doctrine (Once Saved, Always Saved).

Let's take a look at another passage that speaks to the state of the church in the last days...

2 Tim 4:3-4 – *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own*

desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

What kind of teachers will Christians insist on as the Church Age wears on?

- Teachers who will tell them what they want to hear; feel good messages on Christian living, not conviction of sin, avoiding offense (gospel-lite)
- Compromise with the world to be “seeker-friendly” and not be labeled as intolerant

What is the danger of this kind of feel-good teaching?

Eventually, people will turn from the truth and embrace fables

How have we seen people abandon the truth and turn aside to fables in the church today?

Theistic evolution – the idea that God used an evolutionary process to bring about the creation.

The problem with this is that it sheds doubt on Scripture leading to even more severe doctrines of demons.

Cheap Grace – the idea that just proclaiming your self to be a Christian makes it so.

Matt 7:21-23 – Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Social Gospel – we are sharing the gospel with people just by doing nice things for people. St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” ...but words are necessary:

Rom 10:14 – How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Let’s take a look at our primary text that characterizes the Age of the church we are in...

Church historians have often pointed out how the seven churches of Revelation reflect the general characteristics of churches during the Church Age.

Hal Lindsey believes that the seven churches were literal assemblies that existed in Asia Minor at the time John wrote, and that they prophetically describe seven ages extending from the apostolic church to the church of the last days. He presented the following associations in

There’s A New World Coming, his commentary on the book of Revelation:

1. The Church in Ephesus, The Loveless Church: Apostolic Church (A.D. 33–100)
2. The Church in Smyrna, The Persecuted Church: Era of Persecution Under the Ten Caesars (A.D. 100–312)
3. The Church in Pergamum, The Compromising Church: Era of Church-State Union (A.D. 312–590)
4. The Church in Thyatira, The Corrupt Church: Era Spanning the Middle Ages (A.D. 590–1517)
5. The Church in Sardis, The Dead Church: Protestant Reformation (A.D. 1517–1750)
6. The Church in Philadelphia, The Faithful Church: Era of Revival and Great Awakening (A.D. 1750–1925)
7. The Church in Laodicea, The Lukewarm Church: Era of “Higher Criticism” (A.D. 1900–Tribulation)

So, why is it a good idea to look at what the Lord says about the Laodiceans?

Since the Laodicean error is the spirit of the Age, it would be to our advantage if we understand it so as not to contribute to it. We may be in the Laodicean church but we don't have to be Laodicean believers.

Revelation 3:14-22

¹⁴ “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵ “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— ¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. ¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. ²¹ To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. ²² “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

What do we learn about our Lord from the names He uses for Himself (v. 14)?

- **Amen** - it is so, so be it... expresses solemn ratification or agreement with the Father
- **Faithful and True Witness** - He speaks the truth about all things

- **Beginning of the creation of God** - He is the Creator; this establishes His authority over us (so we had better listen to Him)

What is our Lord's complaint against the Laodiceans (v. 15-16)?

They are neither hot or cold, they are lukewarm toward Him.

- **hot:** on fire for the Lord
- **cold:** no love for the Lord
- **lukewarm:** saying you love the Lord but actions do not support this

Why would Jesus rather people be cold than lukewarm?

- At least those who are cold are honest, and they can be warmed up
- Those who are lukewarm think they have already arrived in their religion and don't need to be on fire for Jesus
- Going from cold to hot is more obvious a change and God can use that to help others see their need for Him

What other complaint does the Lord have about the Laodiceans (v. 17)?

They are rich in worldly things but don't realize they are poor in spiritual things.

How does Jesus describe the spiritually poor?

- **wretched** - very unfortunate in condition or circumstances; pitiable
- **miserable** - someone who is unhappy and unpleasant
- **poor** - lacking what is needed, low quality
- **blind** - unable to see the truth or things of God
- **naked** - exposed and vulnerable to the hazards of the world

Why is it that the wealthy tend to be spiritually poor?

They have sufficient worldly resources that they don't believe they need to be dependent on God.

What does Jesus counsel the spiritually poor?

Purchase pure gold from God; this symbolizes true spiritual wealth:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20)

treasure in heaven - that which will last into eternity; relationships with the Lord and those who will also be spending eternity with the Lord

What is the significance of the gold (spiritual wealth) being refined by fire?

It is tested and purified... it will stand in the judgment of God:

each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is (1 Cor 3:13)

What is the spiritual wealth we get from Jesus a requirement for (v 18)?

We need the Lord's spiritual wealth in order to be rich (not wanting for anything). We will not miss out on any of the blessings of this world in heaven.

What else should we purchase from God?

- White garments which symbolizes the righteous acts of the saints per Revelation 19:8. This is important so that our shame of being a sinner may be covered.
- Eye salve so that we may see the things of God
the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14)

How do we make these purchases from God?

We ask God for them:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8)

These gifts are free but we must know we need them in order to ask for them and that they can only come from God.

What is the prerequisite for God answering our prayers?

You must have a personal relationship with Him...

Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him (John 9:31)

Why does God rebuke and chasten us (v. 19)?

Because God loves us.

What should our response be to being rebuked and chastened by God?

- **be zealous** - be devoted to God; energetically support Him and His agenda
- **repent** - turn from our sin and resolve to make the changes we need to do in order to sin no more

What does it mean that Jesus is standing at the door and knocking (v. 20)?

Jesus has done everything necessary for us to have a relationship with Him, it is up to us to allow Him to enter into our lives

Why should we open the door of our hearts to Jesus?

He will dine with us... share fellowship so that we may grow in our relationship with Him.

Why don't people open the door to Jesus?

They don't hear Him...

- they're so focused on themselves that they're not open to an outside voice.
- they don't recognize who it is that is calling to us; they don't know Jesus as Savior...

the sheep follow him, for they know his voice (John 10:4)

Why should we want to grow in our relationship with Jesus?

- Out of gratitude for what He did for us; it pleases Him.
- It fulfills our purpose for which we were created, to have a relationship with Him... *for in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28)
- It is part of having a relationship with Him; if we're not growing, we have to wonder if we really have a relationship with Him
- There will be rewards for growing in our relationship with Him. The more we can grow in our relationship with Him in this mortal life, the greater capacity we'll have to participate in what He is doing in eternity (see Parable of Talents, Matt 25:14-30)

What must we overcome (v. 21)?

We must overcome the temptations of the world that draws into the Laodicean spirit of the Age.

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:16)

How can we overcome the worldly temptations of the Age?

By purchasing the spiritual wealth that Jesus wants to give us.

What is the reward for overcoming the tempting spirit of the Age?

To rule with Christ as He has promised...

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Rev 20:6)

Why does the Church become lukewarm to Christ in the time prior to His return?

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power (1 Tim 3:1-5)

- The perilous times are not just physical but also spiritual.
- There will be the practice of religion but being on fire in a relationship with the Creator will be lacking.

What power is being denied?

- That God cares about us and intervenes in the affairs of men
- Paul goes on to remind Timothy of the need to follow true doctrine which we know because:
All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (1 Tim 3:16-17)

Why does Paul remind us about the authority of Scripture in the context of telling us about conditions of the last days?

- Not correctly recognizing the authority of Scripture will be a problem in the last days.
- Indeed, it contributes to people being lukewarm toward Jesus.

Why is it important to see Scripture as being inspired by God?

- this is necessary to be compelled to study it... if not inspired by God, why bother?
- It is necessary to grow in your relationship with God... if it is not inspired, how will you get to know Him?

So what? What application should we make from this study of the Laodicean era?

- Just because we live in the Laodicean era, it doesn't mean we have to be Laodicean Christians.
- Stoke the fires of the excitement we had when we first realized that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and demonstrated the glory of eternal life to which we get to look forward.
- This should give us a better sense of the times we're living in & get on with what God is calling us to do.