

# End Times Apostasy

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I recently read a series of articles by Dr. Andy Woods of Sugarland Bible Church on “The Last Days Apostasy of the Church” that was very good. So, I thought it merited a Bible study because its relevance to our day. It better helps us understand God’s plan for the end times when we also understand what Scripture reveals about the last days apostasy of the church.

## What is the apostasy of the church?

The English word apostasy is derived from two Greek words, the preposition apo, which means “away from” and the verb histēmi, which means, “to stand.” Thus, apostasy means, “to stand away from.”

- While some might think that apostasy relates to some external factor such as whether the economy is up or down, the subject of biblical apostasy relates to internal church conditions.

## How is apostasy a sign of the last days?

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*

When we speak of the signs of the end, many subjects come to mind such as the return of the Jews to their land or the trend toward one-world government. However, these kinds of signs concern God’s future program for Israel rather than the church.

- Apostasy is the specific scriptural sign given indicating that the church is nearing the completion of her earthly mission.

## Are those who give heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons believers or unbelievers?

They are certainly professing believers, some of whom could be referred to as cultural Christians but this also includes genuine born-again, destined to live with Jesus forever Christians. As we’ll see, this latter group is new or immature Christians.

## What trend should we expect in the last days?

2 Timothy 3:1, 5 – *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come ...having a form of godliness but denying its power*

Paul does not predict a last days revival but rather the coming of dangerous times in the church: people will falsely think they are right with God because they are doing church. In context, Paul explains...

2 Timothy 3:13 – *But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived”*

Paul in this final letter anticipates an increasing drifting away from truth throughout the church age.

The prediction of growing apostasy throughout the present age can also be seen in the eight Matthew 13 parables...

1. parable of the sower – the gospel will be preached throughout the Church Age with results depending upon how the hearer’s heart has been prepared (Mat. 13:1-9, 18-23)
2. parable of the wheat and the tares –it will be difficult to distinguish between the saved and the unsaved throughout professing Christendom and a separation between them will not transpire until the age’s conclusion (Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43)
3. parable of the mustard seed – Christendom will experience great expansion from a humble beginning (Mat. 13:31-32)
4. parable of the leaven – Christendom will experience increasing moral and doctrinal corruption as the age progresses (Mat. 13:33)
5. parable of the hidden treasure – national Israel will remain in unbelief only to be converted at the age’s conclusion (Mat. 13:44).
6. pearl of great price – the Lord will gain a treasure from among the Gentiles throughout the Church Age (Mat. 13:45-46)
7. parable of the dragnet – same message as the wheat and tares; good and evil co-exists only to be separated at the age’s conclusion (Mat. 13:47-50)
8. parable of the householder – fresh and new truths about the course of the present age must be considered alongside what prior revelation teaches about the future kingdom in order to understand God’s total program (Mat. 13:51-52)

## Where else do we learn of apostasy in the church?

It is one of the most frequently mentioned subjects in all of the New Testament. Warnings are found in the **Gospels** (Matt 13), Acts (Acts 20:29-31), the **Pauline letters** (Rom 16:17-18; Gal 1:6-9; 2 Cor 11:1-15; Philip 3:2, 18-19; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 4; 2 Tim 3-4; Titus 1:10), and the **general epistles** (Heb 2:1-4; 2 Pet 2-3; Jude; 1 John 4:1-6). The early chapters of the Apocalypse also reveal the reality of apostasy. Revelation 2-3 describes seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. **Five of these seven churches are in need of rebuke** from Christ due to their apostate condition.

- Galatians was written in order to warn against the Judaizers.
- Colossians was written for the purpose of warning Christians about the Colossian heresy.
- Hebrews was written to keep the audience from lapsing backwards into Judaism.
- Both Jude and 2 Peter were written as warnings concerning apostasy.

## With so much of the New Testament dealing with apostasy, why don't we hear more sermons on it?

Perhaps the reason for this has to do with the subject's negativity. It is far easier for pastors to talk about something positive, practical, or relevant than it is to warn of the inherent dangers associated with apostasy. And, of course in general, this is Bible prophecy which is to be avoided in this Age of Scoffers.

## What specific Christian doctrines are impacted by apostasy?

1 Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*  
apostates will deny “the faith” – so everything that constitutes the fundamental beliefs of Christians will be on the chopping block. Even sharing the gospel will be considered to be judgmental.

2 Peter 2:1 – *there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them*

How can you call yourself a Christian if you deny the Lord? But that is what universalists and salvation-by-works teachers are doing. To some, being a Christian is merely a cultural identity, not a world-view.

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.*

The trend in the church today is to compromise with the world... that is what the social gospel is all about. Doctrines such as Critical Race Theory with its politically correct social justice is not true biblical justice but a human concept of justice that changes with the culture.

2 Peter 3:4 – *Where is the promise of His coming?*

Those who deny or mock the return of Christ are apostates. This is not a disputable matter (Romans 14), it is a fundamental belief to expect Jesus to return.

- The return of Christ is embraced by virtually all of Christendom's creeds and confessions
- Preterism is resurging... prophecies traditionally understood to have a future fulfillment are seen as having already been fulfilled in history. Full preterists even go so far as to say that there is no such thing as a future Second Coming.

These scoffers will also have other doctrines wrong...

2 Peter 3:5 – *For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water*

The apostates will deny God's role in creation. We can tell ourselves that God used an evolutionary process to bring about the creation in order to avoid being labeled unscientific but this is still compromising to the world.

2 Timothy 2:17-18 – *Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some*

One would think that the doctrine of the resurrection would be off limits since Christianity collapses if Christ has not been resurrected...

1 Cor 15:14 – *if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain*  
apostates would have little respect even for the resurrection and its implication

## How quickly can apostasy happen?

Exodus 32:8 – *They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I have commanded them*

Pretty quick... Exodus 32:1-10 indicates that while Moses was on Mount Sinai for a 40-day period receiving God's Law, the children of Israel at the base of Mount Sinai quickly apostatized by constructing a golden calf.

- What is most shocking about this event is that the ringleader of this apostasy was none other than the high priest Aaron.

Judges 17-18 records a wandering Levite who helped introduce the first instance of idolatry into the land of Israel

after the conquest under Joshua. This idolatry was first introduced into a household and then an entire tribe (Dan). The Levite was Jonathan, the son of Gershom or the grandson of Moses (Judges 18:30).

Galatians 1:6 – *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel*

Paul was astonished at how quickly his readers had deserted the truth that he had imparted to them and was amazed that the Galatians had parted company with him on the very gospel itself.

- They did not disagree with Paul on some tangential or minor issue but rather on the core nature of the gospel, which represents the heart of Christianity.
- They had begun to embrace the false teachings of the Judaizers that sanctification could be achieved through a mixture of faith in addition to obedience to the Mosaic Law (Gal. 3:3).

How long of a period of time elapsed in between Paul's initial contact with the Galatians and when Paul addressed them in his letter? ...about one year.

Rev 2:4 – *Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

Christ charged the church at Ephesus with having left its first love

- Paul founded the church at Ephesus on his third missionary journey
- Ephesus had the ministries of Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila, Timothy, and even John.
- Ephesus also received three letters that became part of the New Testament canon (Eph, 1–2 Tim).
- Within just three and a half decades (A.D. 60 to A.D. 95), the church at Ephesus had departed on the foundational issue of love and devotion to Christ.

### **Do men or Satan cause apostasy?**

Both!

- Demons place ideas into the minds of fallen men typically in positions of ecclesiastical influence in order to push the church further into apostasy.
- Demons also tempt carnal believers, or those who cater to their sin nature. Satan tempted Eve but she made the decision to follow through on her temptation. Adam just ate what the woman put in front of him... but he too knew what he was doing and could have stopped Eve instead of following through on the temptation.

### **What do these passages have to say about the root cause of apostasy?**

Timothy 4:1 – *Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*

This important spiritual reality is that demons are the ultimate source of power behind the last days apostasy of the church

2 Cor 11:3 – *I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his own craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*

Paul expresses concern that just as Satan led Eve away from God's simple command not to eat from the forbidden tree, Satan might similarly lead the Corinthians into apostasy.

Matthew 16:21-23 – *Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

Christ rebuked Peter for giving verbal expressions to satanic thoughts.

Acts 5:3-4 – *Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."*

Peter noted that Satan tempted Ananias and Sapphira to lie to the Holy Spirit while their plot to misrepresent their gift to the church was their own brilliant idea. It seems evident that Ananias and Sapphira were believers since their sudden deaths struck fear into the hearts of the rest of the church (Acts 5:11).

### **Why would Satan seek to cause the church to depart from truth?**

Satan's ambition has always been to push the church into apostasy so as to get it off message and outside of her divine purpose. Once the church becomes something that God never intended, she quickly loses her effectiveness in the world.

### **What is God’s purpose for the church?**

Ephesians 3:21 – *to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever to glorify God*

Ephesians 4:11-12 – *He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*

to build up the church by edifying the saints and equip them for ministry

Mark 16:15 – *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

accomplish worldwide evangelization and disciple making (see also Matt. 28:18-20).

### **What happens when the church is distracted from its purpose?**

Revelation 2:5 – *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.*

The church operates with power only when functioning within her divine design. Once the church moves outside her purpose, she loses power and effectiveness.

- If Satan through apostasy can cause the church to take on tasks that God never intended her to be then he will have crippled the church in accomplishing her earthly mission.

### **What is the result of apostasy?**

1 Tim 1:19-20 – *“...which some have rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme”*

When we contemplate a shipwreck we think of the tremendous loss of life and property. Yet, just as a shipwreck is harmful in the physical world, apostasy is equally as harmful in the spiritual realm.

Acts 20:29 – *“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock”*

Apostasy takes a toll. Bleeding sheep, bruised feelings, and disillusioned Christians are always found in the wake of any church or group that apostatizes from the truth. Paul later warns, *“And their message will spread like cancer.”* (2 Tim 2:17). Here, Paul analogizes apostasy to “cancer” (NKJV) or “gangrene” (NASB). We are all familiar with the destruction that “cancer” or “gangrene” can bring upon the physical body.

### **How has the “church growth movement” contributed to apostasy of the church?**

Church growth is not per se wrong as long as God is the one giving the growth...

1 Cor 3:6 – *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

However, God-induced numerical growth is not what modern-day church growth advocates promote. Rather, they use sociological polling to determine what the unsaved want to experience. This results in worship as entertainment, shorter sermons, “practical” preaching about succeeding in business, and avoiding offensive topics of blood, hell, sin, or Christ’s second coming.

- The end result is that the spirit of the world invades the church and self-love eclipses the love of God...  
2 Tim 3:2-4 – *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*

### **How does self-love describe the Laodicean era of church history?**

Rev 3:20 – *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.*

The Laodicean church was so apostatized that Christ was no longer the governing authority. Laodicea actually means “ruled by the people” or “democracy,” in other words.”

### **What can we do personally to avoid getting swept away by the current of apostasy?**

1 Thess 5:21 – *Test all things; hold fast what is good* God has blessed us with a reliable standard of divine truth through the closed canon of Scripture. Thus, believers can protect themselves from the apostasy that is so prevalent in our day by simply comparing everything we hear with the eternal Word of God.

- This was the test they used in Old Testament times...  
Deut 13:1-3 – *If there arises among you a prophet or dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet...*

And it is also applicable during the Church Age...

Gal. 1:8 – *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*

## **How do we know what we hear and think is really from God?**

We are cautioned to test our own thoughts against Scripture because they may not be from the Holy Spirit...

1 John 4:1 – *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world*

The Bereans were commended for this:

Acts 17:11 – *These were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

And so were the Ephesians...

Rev. 2:2 – *And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars*

## **Why is spiritual maturity important in having the ability to test all things?**

Hebrews 5:14 – *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

The way those in the banking industry are trained to recognize counterfeit currency is not by studying counterfeit currency. Rather, they become familiar with texture, color, and even the smell of genuine currency.

- Lack of familiarity with the real leads to an inability to recognize the false.
- Similarly, scriptural illiteracy prevents Christians from being able to discern truth from error consequently making them vulnerable to apostasy.

The capacity to resist the natural flow of apostasy is only possible when the believer is sufficiently familiar with Scripture that they can actively compare every teaching with prior divine revelation.

## **How does one become sufficiently spiritually mature to recognize erroneous doctrine when they hear it?**

1 Peter 2:2 – *as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*

Unless Scripture occupies a preeminent place in our lives and churches, spiritual maturity is an impossibility. Scripture has the ability to feed the deepest yearnings and needs of the human heart like no other book...

Matt. 4:4 – *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

## **What can we learn about the importance of Scripture from the occasions Israel saw revival?**

The general trajectory of national Israel throughout the pages of the Old Testament is one of rebellion and disobedience. However, the few recorded instances of a revival are always marked by an important prerequisite: a return to Scripture.

- The many reforms of Josiah's day were preceded by the discovery of the Law in the temple and a desire to embrace it (2 Kgs. 22).
- The great revival in Nehemiah's day was preceded by Ezra on a platform reading and explain God's Word to God's people (Neh. 8-12).
- The Protestant Reformation would not have happened unless the reformers had focused on God's Word alone. It was also a key factor that the printing press made God's Word more readily available to more people.

## **So, what conclusions can we make from this discussion on apostasy?**

- It is an important sign of the times.
- It can happen quickly.
- It is destructive and keeps the church from its purpose.
- Despite trend toward apostasy in our own day, we can protect ourselves from its influence by returning to the fidelity, authority, and centrality of Scripture.