

The Basics of Apostasy

By Steve Schmutzer

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Given my fascination with issues pertaining to the end times, I often find myself considering the matter of "apostasy." It's an inevitable theme that crops up within a comprehensive assessment of the prophetic Scriptures.

To illustrate, Paul urged the fledgling and predominantly-Gentile church of Thessalonica to not be deceived. He reminded them that the day of the Lord would not arrive "...*except there come a falling away first*" (2 Thess. 2:3). The Greek word for "falling away" is *apostasia*, and we get "apostasy" from it.

There is debate as to what exactly Paul might be talking about here. Is he referring to a falling away from the Christian faith, or is he referring to the antichrist or a revolt against God? Could he even be making reference to the Rapture? There are vocal proponents for each suggestion.

It's not my intent here to dissect Paul's specific intentions with his use of *apostasia* in 2 Thess. 2:3, but rather to consider the term as it's used more plainly elsewhere - in Acts 21:21, for example. Here, the Jewish elders in Jerusalem confronted Paul when they wrongly imagined he was advising Jewish believers to "abandon," "turn away from," or "forsake," their culture and customs. Various translations state it differently, but the general idea of "moving away from a previously-held religious belief" is consistent.

Seen in that light, apostasy is not a word we use much in today's overly-tolerant Christian culture - but I feel we should. The broad emphasis of apostasy in the Bible is a willful abandonment of God's truth, and insofar as the modern church is concerned, there are various ways this takes place. These include the suppression of the Gospel, the elevation of prescriptive worship, the substitution of sound doctrine with socially-acceptable pabulum, the claim that the church is a continuation of Biblical Israel, or any such choice to yield to worldly compromise where Biblical commitment is needed instead.

Apostasy was a seminal concern Jesus had when He questioned if the Son of Man would "...*find faith on earth*" at His coming (Luke 18:8). The implied answer is in the negative, and this seems to be further supported in Matthew 24:12 where Jesus states the end of human history will be a time when "...*the love of many will grow cold.*" The bottom line is apostasy is a problem in the Christian faith, and it will become a greater problem as time wears on.

It's important to not confuse apostasy with apathy, though they may be cousins at times. Each can lead to the other. Each results in faith becoming dimmed, detached, and disengaged. The net effect is summarized by Tony Campolo who states, "*Too many Christians come to church just as they are, sing five stanzas of 'Just As I Am,' then leave just as they were.*" There's a ritual happening, but there's no real relationship.

Because apostasy is often represented by an obsession of what we don't want to be rather than the passion of who we really are, the market-driven church is especially vulnerable to apostasy's invasion. In choosing to employ the world's ideas rather than the life-changing truth of God's Word, the church is flirting dangerously with the perils of apostasy.

Regardless of what body of believers we each may choose to be part of, it's crucial to understand that the greater church is an institution that is "called out." To be called out means to be "holy," and to be holy means to be "different" or "distinct." Because God intended for His truth to be preserved and proclaimed within the church, the unsaved person should find the church to be alien to his patterns, foreign to his worldview, but chock-full of the answers he is seeking.

That's hardly happening anymore. Hard-hitting Biblical truth is what we most need from our pulpits, but political correctness is often what we are receiving instead. The result is we're sipping our doctrines through a straw rather than chewing on meat. Political correctness is "political" for sure but it is hardly "correct." It's a chief symptom of apostasy and it's nearly always an adversary to sound Biblical teaching.

As churches - or as individual believers for that matter - cower from the responses of a world that does not want accountability for its depravity, faith is weakened. It is insulated from the trials and challenges which must prove it and which strengthen it (James 1:2-4).

Real faith always suffers where apostasy invades.

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