

# *Apostasy and Its Antidote*

TA McMahon

Apostasy is the desertion of one's faith or religion. It is the forsaking of the belief to which one had previously adhered. In *Acts 21:21* the Apostle Paul is falsely accused of encouraging the Jews to "*forsake*" the teachings of Moses. The Greek term that is translated "*forsake*" is *apostasia*. Apostasy, however, rarely comes about abruptly. It is more often a process, and some may contribute to it without becoming complete apostates.

It began in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment and in perfect fellowship with God. They submitted to God in all things—until, that is, Eve got into a dialog with God's adversary, Satan, the first apostate (see also *Isaiah 14:12-14*). He had her reconsidering God's Word by questioning what He commanded: "*Yea, hath God said...?*" The Serpent's objective was to get her to "*forsake*" the commandment God had given to Adam: they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (*Genesis 2:17; 3:1*). Eve succumbed to the seduction, Adam joined his spouse in rebellion against God, and the seeds of apostasy took root.

The seed of apostasy sprouted in Cain, who forsook God's instructions for bringing an acceptable sacrifice and instituted his own type of offering. Apostasy increased with the building of the city and the tower of Babel. It unified people to the degree that God had to "*confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth*" (*Genesis 11:9*). Later, among the Israelites, Aaron participated in apostasy when he assisted them in their idolatrous worship of the golden calf (*Exodus 32*).

Throughout the history of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel many of the kings became apostate. King Ahaz of Judah was a prime example. William MacDonald suggests in his commentary that the prefix of Ahaz's name, "*Jeho*," which stands for the name of Jehovah God in "*Jehoahaz*," may have been omitted by the Holy Spirit "*because Ahaz was an apostate*" (*Believer's Bible Commentary*, pp. 409-10). He endorsed idolatry in Judah and had his son pass through the fire in a ritual to the god Molech. Submitting to Ahaz's instructions, Urijah the priest (who is nevertheless commended in *Isaiah*) participated in the apostasy by carrying out the king's command to make a copy of a pagan altar and set it up for divination purposes. Ahaz then had the altar incorporated in the Temple worship in Jerusalem.

Apostasy has been a part of every generation since the fall of mankind. Scripture tells us that it will culminate in the last days when the Antichrist is revealed. His religion will be an apostate Christianity—the total antithesis of biblical Christianity. It will accommodate all religions. Although the apostasy will not be fully realized until after the Rapture of the church, its development has been ongoing from the time when sin entered the human race. Furthermore, down through biblical and church history, many true believers, either in ignorance or because of the weaknesses of their flesh, have contributed to apostasy. Solomon seems to exemplify this. As a believer, he was used of the Holy Spirit to build the Temple and to write much of the Book of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, yet he also married many pagan women, which was contrary to Scripture. These women turned him to idolatry and he built temples for them to worship their false gods.

In church history, men such as Augustine and Martin Luther are regarded as true believers, especially by those who hold to Reformation theology. Yet Augustine conceptualized many of the dogmas that are foundational to the false theology and false gospel of the largest apostate institution in Christendom—the Roman Catholic Church. Luther is to be commended for his heroic stance against the Church of Rome but certainly not for his replacement theology and his anti-biblical hatred of the Jews. Later church history is replete with professing and confessing Christians who (knowingly or unknowingly) participated in the development of apostasy.

In summary of the above, apostasy began with the sin of mankind, will greatly increase in the Last Days, and will be complete when the Antichrist rules this earth during the seven-year Great Tribulation period. Therefore, as the world moves toward the apostasy's total fulfillment, all Christians will be vulnerable to its destructive seduction.

What is the antidote? How can we keep ourselves from succumbing to those things that would draw us into the apostasy? Let's start with the prevention program presented in *Psalm 1: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*

The psalmist gives instructions for a spiritually fruitful life in the Lord. These instructions are centered upon our being strengthened by God's Word and begin with the admonition that we are not to follow the counsel of the ungodly. This doesn't mean avoiding counsel only from those who are obviously evil but rather rejecting any counsel that does not conform to what is taught in the Word of God. Twice we find in *Proverbs (14:12; 16:25)* that there is a way that seems right to people but it is not God's way. If it is not God's way, it leads to the ways of death, which means a separation from God's truth that will ultimately lead to destruction in one's life.

A major factor related to the apostasy's subversion of the evangelical church is that fewer and fewer professing Christians really believe in the sufficiency of the Word of God for *"all things that pertain to life and godliness"* (*2 Peter 1:3*). Instead, evangelicals are turning more and more to the ungodly wisdom of the world. The evangelical church is one of the leading referral entities for psychological counseling services. The shepherds are turning their flocks over to professional psychotherapists, who are, in a sense, the biblical equivalent of hirelings. In addition, they are attempting to increase the numbers of their flocks by turning to marketing techniques, which the Church Growth Movement gleaned from the world. These have proven deadly to biblical faith.

Scripture's warning against walking in the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the path of sinners, or sitting in the seat of the scornful reveals a progression, which is actually a regression—from waywardness to wickedness. By listening to and heeding what the lost—and even the enemies of the faith—have to say, one settles in comfortably with their perspective and eventually practices what they preach. The tragic result is that the heart becomes hardened to God's truth, and one's attitude turns to scorn when confronted with it.

The psalmist then shifts from what believers need to avoid to the primary preventative measure they need to incorporate into their lives: *"...his delight is in the law of the Lord[meaning the Law, the Prophets, and the Testimony], and in his law [the Scriptures] doth he meditate day and night"* (*Psalm 1:2*).

The main reason that apostasy is spreading so quickly among evangelicals today is that many are functionally Biblically illiterate. This means that although nearly all *"Christians"* have Bibles and are able to read, too few do read them, and those who do don't make it a practice that guides their lives. This is one of the reasons for a shocking response revealed by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. It published a survey of more than 35,000 American adults and found that 57 percent of those who claim to be evangelicals believe that *"many religions can lead to eternal life."*

Obviously, they were not aware of nor did they take seriously the verses in which Jesus declared, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6) and Peter exclaimed, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). Scripture tells us that such a condition will be pervasive in the last days: *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables"* (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

In our day, biblical absolutes and an exclusive way of salvation are viewed by the world as the epitome of intolerance, an accusation that many evangelicals can't handle—especially those who don't know the Bible well enough to give a biblical response. Meditating upon the Word continually is the obvious solution to rectifying such a condition. Furthermore, there is both encouragement and help from our Lord. Consider His prayer to the Father for believers: *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth"* (John 17:17). Jesus wants us sanctified, or set apart, as those who, regardless of what the world thinks and says, are confident that His Word is the truth. He said, *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:31-32). Part of that freedom is a confidence to *"earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 1:3). One cannot *"contend"* for something of which he is mostly ignorant. Being able to defend one's faith can only come about through a disciplined study of the Scriptures.

In the Book of Proverbs we're told, *"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding"* (Proverbs 4:7). God has made His wisdom available to us in His Word. Furthermore, to all who have put their faith in Jesus, He has given the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to help us to *"get understanding."* Knowing the Holy Scriptures is God's prevention program against apostasy, and it is available to all who seek after Him. That is the biblical criteria for getting wisdom and understanding. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *"From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). Clearly, it is not a matter of one's intellectual ability or education but rather one's desire to know God's truth and to diligently pursue it. The Lord's choice of uneducated fishermen as apostles to be the primary messengers of His Word—rather than those highly educated within the religious establishment—should speak volumes to anyone who thinks he doesn't qualify.

The believer who meditates continually on God's Word will find that his efforts will be both preventive against apostasy and for the strengthening of his faith. Furthermore, it is the basis for being spiritually fruitful: *"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"* (Psalm 1:3). It is also the means for equipping the believer for the spiritual war that is now raging.

The crux of the spiritual battle is over the Word of God. The adversary's strategy is to discredit the

Scriptures in every way and by every means possible. As we noted, it began in the Garden initially by the questioning of God's Word, followed immediately by the denial of its truth (*Genesis 3:4-5*). Those who do not recognize that they are in such a battle may have already been captured by the lies of the Adversary. The Apostle Paul wrote that we are not to be ignorant of his devices (*2 Corinthians 2:11*) and used military metaphors for more than a literary device; he underscored the reality of the spiritual warfare taking place and sets up the believer's defense:

*Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13-17)*

Our fight is the good fight of faith, remembering that our weapons are not carnal but spiritual (*2 Corinthians 10:4*). It is "warfare" over the truth, with the goal of being "able to withstand in the evil day." Our victory is simply to stand for God's Word.

As the battle intensifies, which Scripture indicates it will prior to the Lord's coming for His saints, we need to be "*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*" (*Ephesians 6:18*). We need to circle the wagons with other believers for fellowship and spiritual protection, for counsel, for encouragement, for correction, for comfort, and for ministry to one another. If such things become our practice while we wait upon the Lord, even though the Apostasy dries up the spiritual environment around us, we shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever we do shall prosper in the Lord.

TBC