

# Apostasy - The Rising Influence in the Church (And How to Avoid It)

By Rich Jacobs, M.D.

**Apostasy** - from a Latin word that means “to revolt”. Refers to a renunciation of religious faith, an abandonment of previous loyalty (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). With respect to Christianity, apostasy refers to a falling away from Christ and the Christian faith.

1. Apostasy has taken place sporadically over the millennia.
2. There will be wholesale, systematic apostasy in the church just before Christ returns again. (Unlined scripture verses emphasize key ideas to ponder.)
  - a. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 - members of churches must fall away before Jesus returns. This they do because they prefer what they prefer. (Did they accept a “savior” but reject the Lord?!)

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. 5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? 6 And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. NAS

- i. Apostasy is associated with the ascent of the Antichrist (v. 3). It may even prepare the way for him, in the same way that John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Christ.
- ii. The restraint of wickedness will be removed (v. 6, 7)
- iii. Apostasy will be supported by Satanic miracles (v. 9)
- iv. Those who embrace apostasy will be deceived because they did not love the Truth (v. 10)
- v. God will send a deluding influence on the apostate because they took pleasure in wickedness (v. 11, 12)

## b. 1 Timothy 4:1-5

### 1 Tim 4:1-5

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 3 men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. NAS

- i. Apostasy will become generalized in the “later time” (v 1)
- ii. Demons and evil spirits will lead people astray from the faith (v. 2)
- iii. False “works” righteousness will take the place of righteousness based on faith and obedience in Christ (v. 3-5)

## c. 2 Timothy 3:1-7; 4:3, 4 - selfishness and self-righteousness based on legalism

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## 2 Timothy 3:1-7

1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God- 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 6 They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, 7 always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. NIV

## 2 Timothy 4:3-5

3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. NIV

- i. Apostasy will occur during difficult times (v. 3:1)
- ii. Those who fall away from the faith will be selfish, conceited, fleshly, reckless, and brutal. (v. 3:2-4)
- iii. Paradoxically, they will appear to be pious and religious, but it will be a religion based deception and seduction (v. 3:5-6)
- iv. The apostate will appear to be learned men and women, though they will renounce the truth of Christ and God (v. 3:7)
- v. Those who fall away from the faith will garner their own teachers and advocates to support their fallen beliefs. They will turn away from the truth and prefer myths. (v. 4:3, 4)

## 3. There are common traits to those who are vulnerable to apostasy

### a. Philippians 3:18, 19 - doing what we want; being focused on worldly things

18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. NAS

- i. Their desires is their God. What they want controls them. (v. 19)
- ii. They are fleshly and worldly -- “ . . . *they set their minds on earthly things* . . . “ (v. 19)
- iii. They glory in shame (v. 19)
- iv. They are really enemies of Christ (v. 18)
- v. They share a common fate: their destruction (v. 19)

### b. Ephesians 2:1-3 - living by our own thoughts and desires

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. NAS

- i. Live and act in accordance with worldly values (v 2)
- ii. Controlled by demonic powers (v. 2)
  1. lusts of the flesh
  2. lusts of the mind
  3. disobedience

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## 4. Why these common traits result in apostasy

### a. Galatians 5:17-21 - practicing fleshliness

17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God NAS

- i. The flesh wars against the Spirit (v. 17)
- ii. The truth is that Christians cannot do what they want to do (v. 17), but the apostate do not live in this truth
- iii. Those who live according to the flesh are led by the flesh and they do not make Christ their Lord. Their practices guarantee they will not inherit the Kingdom of God (v. 19-21)

### b. Galatians 5:1-12 - the "form of godliness" without power

1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3 And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. 4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love. 7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord, that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. 11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves. NAS

- i. The apostate seek to justify themselves through work righteousness, all the while being led by the flesh and the "world system"
- ii. Those who seek "works righteousness" have fallen from grace and it is only by grace that we are saved, through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 5:1-5; *Ephesians 2:8,9*)
- iii. The apostate are concerned about being accepted by the world, by making a good show (v 6:12)

## 5. How to avoid falling into apostasy (*Look up the Bible verses listed here.*)

- a. Realize that you are not your own boss; you cannot do what you want or think. You must follow Christ, by the leading of the Holy Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 6:17-20; 7:23*)
- b. Exercise discipline in faith in your life (*1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Colossians 2:5*)
  - i. Daily Bible study (*Proverbs 3*)
  - ii. Daily prayer (*Colossians 4:2, 3*)
  - iii. Tithing and giving (*2 Corinthians 9:7*)
  - iv. Church attendance (*1 John 2:18, 19*)
  - v. Ministry and service in your calling, using your talents and gifts from God (*Ephesians 2:10*)
  - vi. Walk by faith, not by "sight" -- exercise faith (*Proverbs 3:5, 6*)
  - vii. Share your faith in Christ with unbelievers (*Matthew 28:19*)

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- c. Realize that apostasy results from a series of seemingly small compromises. A long journey is taken one step at a time. (*Ephesians 5:1-12*)
- d. Reject worldly values and become heavenly minded (*1 John 2:15-17*)
- e. Put the passions and desires of the flesh to death -- ignore their solicitations. (*Colossians 3:5-10; 1 Peter 1:13-15; 2:11*)
- f. Practice humility, generosity, and kindness (*Colossians 3:12-15; 1 Corinthians 8:1-3*)
- g. Develop and practice spiritual discernment (*Matthew 10:16; 1 John 4:1-3*)
- h. Make up your mind ahead of time that you will pay the price for Christ (*Luke 9:62; Luke 14:26-33*). Set you mind and will to answer these questions now.
  - i. What will you do in the time of temptation to stand firm?
  - ii. What will you do in the time of persecution to remain faithful?
  - iii. What will you do in the time of sacrifice to remain obedient?
  - iv. What will you do in the time of insult and offense to remain loving and forgiving?
  - v. What will you do in the time of confusion and doubt to keep the faith?