

WHAT IS APOSTASY?

By Denver Cheddie

Apostasy means an abandonment of one's faith or religious convictions. It is a willful, deliberate departure from God, and is never accidental. Apostates are hardened to the point of not being able to repent (Heb 6:6; 10:26). If anyone repents God will forgive, but apostates cannot repent because repentance is not given to them (Acts 11:18). Apostasy is deliberately siding with the enemies of Christ (Phil 3:18) despite the knowledge of the gospel.

ENMITY WITH GOD

An apostate is an enemy of Jesus – someone who seeks to undermine the gospel. The greatest enemy of the gospel is not sin, but false doctrine – especially false doctrine that takes emphasis away from Christ and his atonement. Most of the NT was written to undo the effects of such false teaching. Most of the apostates mentioned in the bible were false teachers, not just casual backsliders. Heb. 10:27 refers to them as adversaries. The Hebrews (from the book of Hebrews) were not just backsliding and “not coming to church anymore”. They were reneging on their faith and denying Christ. They were also siding with those who persecuted their colleagues for abandoning Judaism and embracing Christ.

DELIBERATE DEPARTURE

According to 2 Peter 2:15 apostates have forsaken the right way. Peter gives the example of Balaam. Balaam knew exactly what God's will was but because he was allured by the wealth of the ungodly, acted the way he did (Numbers 22-24). He did not sin in ignorance but deliberately sided with the enemy of God against the people of God.

Heb 3:12 warns us not to *depart* from the living God. An apostate is not a backslider. Someone can backslide from various things. You can backslide from the relationship you once had with God if you don't maintain your prayer life. You can backslide from the ministry you once held if you get your priorities mixed up. But backsliding can be temporary and does not imply a loss of salvation. In fact the word backslide never appears in the New Testament. Apostasy on the other hand is permanent (impossible to renew them to repentance). It is a renunciation of one's faith and a departure from God.

UNPARDONABLE

In 1 Tim 1:13 Paul tells us that he obtained mercy for his pre-Christian sins because he acted in ignorance. Does this mean if we sin deliberately, God will not forgive us? NO. Paul was referring specifically to his persecuting the church. He was an enemy of God, but was not considered an apostate because he did not have the knowledge of the gospel. If he was enlightened and still continued to make himself an enemy of God, then that may have been considered apostasy and he would not have obtained mercy.

Heb 10:26 says if we sin willfully there is no more sacrifice for sin, but it refers to a specific sin – apostasy (vs. 25). There are some who would like to believe that it refers to just about any sin, but if it did, then what that means is once we commit one deliberate act of sin, we can NEVER be forgiven. Most of the sins we supposedly commit in weakness are in fact deliberate. We had the conviction, yet we sinned. Besides, 2 Thess. 3:14,15 say that a believer could disobey the commandments given and still remain “a brother”. Read it. He would receive due chastisement but as a son.

CAN CHRISTIANS BECOME APOSTATES?

Let us consider various scriptures which talks about apostates.

2 Timothy 3:1-17 refers to unsaved people attacking the faith from the outside. The examples of Jannes and Jambres (the magicians in Egypt who opposed Moses) suggest that it was unsaved people Paul had in mind. Titus 1:10-16 again refers to unsaved Jews.

2 Peter 2 definitely speaks of people within the church. Whether they were genuine believers or just temporary churchgoers is a matter of dispute. Verse 20 says they escaped the pollution of the world. Verse 21 says they knew the way of righteousness. Sure it can be said that some unsaved people know the way of righteousness (academically rather than personally)

and still choose not to believe. But are there unsaved people who have actually escaped the pollution of the world? And if so, how exactly? If the people Peter had in mind were NEVER Christians, his choice of words are rather bewildering.

Some may argue that in verse 22 he calls them dogs and not sheep, thus they were never christians. But this is not a satisfactory argument. Peter also referred to Pastors as shepherds. If a pastor is a shepherd, does that mean he is no longer a sheep? Does that mean pastors are not saved? Figurative expressions could only be interpreted within their particular contexts. To say that the apostates were never genuine believers because Paul does not call them sheep is to really slaughter the metaphor. You can't make doctrine on dog vs. sheep. Furthermore this feeble argument does not answer verse 20. They still have to explain how an unsaved dog could escape the pollution of the world.

Jude 5-16 is very similar to Second Peter, but does not really specify whether the subjects were once saved or never saved.

Heb 6:4,5 says apostates were once enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, made partakers of the Holy Spirit. Once again it is hard not to consider these folks Christians. Proponents of unconditional eternal security would say that this description could fit certain unsaved people. I agree that some of them can. But were unsaved people ever made partakers of the Holy Spirit? One writer says that the phrase "partake of the Holy Spirit" is not one of the usual terms for a Christian experience e.g. "filled with the Holy Spirit",

“walking in the Spirit”, “baptized with the Holy Spirit” etc. But how are you so sure that “partake of the Holy Spirit” should not be added to that list?

Look at some other scriptures that use the word partake. Right there in Hebrews 3:1 the “holy brethren” are said to be “partakers of the heavenly calling”. Scrolling down to Heb 3:14, “we are made partakers of Christ”. Also in Ephesians 3:6, Gentiles are made partakers of Christ’s promise. So if someone is referred to as a partaker of the heavenly calling, that means he is saved. I think it would be fair to say that Heb. 6:4,5 refers to Christians who apostatized.

The fact that verse 39 says “we are confident of better things for you” doesn’t mean the previous verses do not apply to believers. Paul was simply encouraging them not to let him down. Paul’s personal confidence in his flock, or his desire for their perseverance doesn’t guarantee anything. God’s desire to see all saved doesn’t even guarantee that all will be saved. And Paul’s confidence is not the same thing as God’s foreknowledge.

Heb 10:29 describes the apostate as having been sanctified by the blood of the covenant. I don’t know how an unsaved person could be considered to be sanctified by the blood of the covenant. It is true that an unbelieving person may be “sanctified” by virtue of having a believing spouse (1 Cor. 7:14), but not by the blood of the covenant. Once again I don’t see how Heb 10:29 could be referring to anything other than former Christians. Some may claim that in verse 39 Paul says “WE are not of them who draw back”. They make a distinction between “we” and “they”. That raises the question of whom Paul’s audience was. It was a mixed group containing genuine believers and pretenders, future apostates as well as those who would endure. Surely Paul did not write only to the genuine believers, no hypocrite

being allowed to read his letter. The "we" referred to the whole group. The "we" could only be a general term Paul used to encourage his audience to persevere. Hebrews 2:1 also uses the word "we". If "we" are guaranteed to endure, then why would Paul encourage his audience, in verse 35, not to cast away their confidence? Doesn't that mean "we" could cast away "our" confidence? (You need to read these scriptures for yourself to follow my arguments).

PREDESTINATION

Unconditional Eternal security goes hand in hand with a hard line Calvinistic view of predestination. Some are predestined to be saved and the rest are not. How could those predestined to be saved eventually be lost? So the argument goes. I would rather not go into a full discussion on this issue, but suffice it to say that if God only predestined some to be saved and his "irresistible grace" ensures that they are saved and remain saved, why then did he wish that ALL come to repentance (1 Tim 2:4)? Is God some kind of sicko? And if all those predestined to be saved will eventually be saved, why on earth did those apostles sacrifice their lives to preach the gospel? This view of predestination is clearly not correct. It cannot be if it denies the free moral agency of man. In some difficult to understand way, predestination and free will are supposed to go hand in hand. Neither could negate the other. They are both true.

Make absolutely no mistake about it, there is security for the believer in Christ IF he remains or continues in the faith. That is if he does not

apostatize. There are numerous scriptures which encourage us to continue in the faith. The following is a partial list: Hebrews 3: 6,14; 4:14; Rom 11:22; Col. 1: 23; Acts. 13:43; 14:22. Acts of regular sin (not unto death) are covered under God's security. The only thing not covered is if a believer of his own free will walks out on God and renounces his faith i.e. does not continue in grace/faith. Others may argue that this is too easy. A believer should be punished for his acts of sin. Well Christ didn't come to make it harder. All sins were paid for when He died. John 3:18 tells us that once we believe there is no condemnation. Other scriptures tell us that we must continue in that faith. End of story.

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