

Apostasy in the Church

by Dwight Pentecost

Apostasy in the Church is a departure from the Word of God, which is the anchor of faith for believers, and can be caused by false teachers and doctrines of demons.

Duration: 43:04

Scripture: Hebrews 6:16-20, Hebrews 7:2, Revelation 2:20

Topics: "Apostasy", "False Teaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of apostasy and its origin. He emphasizes that faith cannot be blind and that it is based on knowledge and understanding of the word of God. The speaker highlights the importance of the word of God in revealing the Father and growing in grace and knowledge. He also mentions that the word of God serves as an anchor for believers in their daily and Christian lives. Additionally, the speaker warns about false teachers who use deceptive methods, particularly targeting women, to spread their false doctrines.

Transcript

...subject of apostasy in the Church. This certainly is a current problem, and a current subject, and I trust that as we open the Scriptures together and consider something of what the Word of God has to say, that God the Holy Spirit will bring blessing and refreshment and encouragement to your heart as you realize that what is happening in Christendom around us was foreknown, foreseen by God, and that things are moving according to the revelation of the Word of God to their ultimate consummation in the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ and his coming in power and great glory. When we speak of apostasy, I believe we need to be very clear in a biblical concept of what we mean by apostasy.

The word apostasy means to depart, to leave a mooring, to leave anchor. As the Greeks used the word apostasy, they used it of a ship that hauled anchor and set sail from the haven in which the ship had been anchored. The word then means to cast off moorings and to launch out away from the safety and the refuge of the harbor or the anchorage.

When in the Word of God we refer to apostasy or departure, it has to do with a departure from that which is the anchor that God has given to believers. We find from the Word of God that the anchor of our faith, of our hope, of our knowledge is the Word of God itself, so that that which determines an apostate is his attitude and his relationship to the Word of God. The Word of God is the anchor, and when a man departs from the Word of God, he has departed from the haven, from the refuge, from the anchorage.

He has cast off the anchor and is now adrift. The place that the Word of God holds is emphasized in many passages. In Peter's epistle, you'll recall, in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 23, Peter tells us that we were born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

The Word of God is the agent that the Spirit of God uses to bring a man to the new birth, and a man will never be born again until some truth of the Word of God is brought home to that sinner's heart. A man is not regenerated by another man's experiences. He is not regenerated by another man's interpretations.

A man is regenerated because he believes the Word of God, and Peter tells us that it is the Word of God, the incorruptible seed that the Spirit of God uses to bring a man to new birth. We find in Romans chapter 10 and verse 17 that the Word of God is the basis of the believer's faith. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

The proposition is very simple. A man cannot believe something of which he is totally ignorant. There is no such thing as blind faith.

A man has to have some fact in mind before he can believe that fact. Everything that a man knows about God, he knows from the Word of God. It is the Word of God that reveals the Father to us.

Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father, and all that Christ has revealed about the Father is in the Word. There is no such thing as a subjective experience in which a man seeks God and finds out God for himself. A man can find God only through the Word of God.

And when a man has come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Word of God, he grows in grace and in knowledge solely through the Word of God. You have to give a man something to believe before he can believe. And so, if a man is to grow in grace and knowledge, he has to grow in the Word of God.

Then again, we find from a passage such as Hebrews chapter 6, verses 17 to 20, that the Word of God is the anchor for the believer in his daily life and in his Christian life. I'm afraid that so many of you have gotten bogged down in the problems in the earlier part of Hebrews chapter 6 that you skipped the last part and jumped over into chapter 7 and have missed this vital truth that the Apostle presents. He says in verse 16 that God swore an oath for confirmation, wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

What the Apostle tells us is that when God inaugurated a program that was to involve not only the nation Israel, but all the nations of the earth as well, that was to provide a savior for all men. God gave a promise and then he confirmed that promise with a covenant. That promise is given in chapter 12 of Genesis, and the covenant that ratified the promise was given in Genesis chapter 15.

Now the believer who goes through the experiences of life has an anchor. The anchor that he has is the word of God, the promise of God, the covenant of God. And no matter how troubled may be the seas over which his boat sails, he has a haven of refuge.

He has an anchor that keeps him from straying and drifting. What is it? What God has said, what God has promised, what God has covenanted. And so the Apostle concludes the sixth chapter of Hebrews by saying, Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, in which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made in high priest forever after the

order of Melchizedek.

These to whom the Apostle was writing were undergoing intense persecution. Religious, political, social, economic pressure was theirs because they had named the name of Christ and had been cut off from all the old relationships that they had previously sustained. But the Apostle says, You have something that will keep you firm.

You have an anchor that is steadfast and sure. What is that anchor? It is the promise, the word of God. And so the Apostles emphasize over and over and over again the centrality of the word of God in the new birth, in spiritual growth and development, in sustaining the child of God through all the vicissitudes of life.

The child of God has the word of God as his foundation and as his anchor. But even though God has provided such a foundation, the word of God tells us there are men who will depart from that foundation, who will cut the anchor ropes and set their ships adrift. And those who abandon the word of God as the foundation of faith, the foundation of salvation, the foundation for faith, the foundation for daily life, are apostates.

Selah, loosely translated, means pause and let that sink in. And a believer can become a practical apostate when they substitute the reasoning of men, the wisdom of men, the philosophies of men, the goals, the aims, methods of men for the word of God. They are practicing apostates.

Now let's look at several passages in which the Apostles warn and describe the apostasy that will characterize the last days. I ask you to turn your Bibles with me, first of all, to 2 Timothy 3, verses 1-6. The Apostle in this passage describes not so much conditions within professing Christendom or conditions within the Church, but conditions in the world in general in which believers will find themselves in the end times.

You will notice in 3.1 the Apostle is saying, "...in the last days perilous times shall come." Let me pause and say a word about that phrase, last day. The last days, as it is used in Scripture, or a companion phrase, latter day, or last day, or the day, refer to a brief period of time before the consummation of a prophesied program. In the Old Testament, the term latter days or last days refers to that period of time of seven years duration, we believe, immediately preceding the second advent of Jesus Christ to the earth, the tribulation period.

That prophetically refers to latter times, last days, or the day, sometimes the day of the Lord. When in the New Testament epistles the phrase last days or latter days or last times occurs, it refers to that period immediately preceding the rapture of the Church. But the phrase always looks at the end of a prophesied program.

When the Apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 3.1, describes conditions in the last days, he is describing the general tenor of the times in which believers will live before the rapture of the Church. As we read these, we must concur, I believe, in the observation that were the Apostle Paul living today and reading our daily newspapers and news magazines, he could not more adequately or completely describe the days in which we live. Will you follow in your text as I read these verses? I'm going to read from the translation of Kenneth Weiss, which I believe makes this passage very graphic.

In the last days difficult times will set in, for men shall be fond of themselves, fond of money, swaggerers, haughty, revilers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable,

slanderers, lacking self-control, savage, haters of that which is good, betrayers, headstrong, besotted with pride, fond of pleasure rather than having an affection for God, having a mere outward semblance of piety toward God, but denying the power of the same. Those words the Apostle describes for us condition in which believers will have to live in the last day, and truly times like those demand an anchor, demand a foundation. But the Apostle says that society as a whole will have a form of godliness, verse 5, but deny the power unto godliness.

What is the power unto godliness? The word of God energized by the Spirit of God in the life of the child of God. And so the society, while it cries out for lawlessness and for godliness, will deny the very foundation of lawlessness and godliness that is the word of God itself. Now, in days like those, the Apostle tells us, Hebrews chapter 6, that we have an anchor.

We need not be cast adrift. We need not fashion our thinking and our living according to the tenor of the days in which we live. But the tragedy in the lives of many Christians and in the lives of many churches is that they pattern their program and their conduct according to the standards of the world in which they live, and abandon the word of God, and consequently are sat adrift in a sea of confusion.

And so the Apostle reminds us again that conformity to the world by a believer is a departure from the anchor, from the foundation, and makes one a practicing apostate. He has departed from the anchorage. Now, after this general description, the Apostle in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 1 to 3, describes the origin of the apostasy.

The origin of the apostasy. 1 Timothy 4.1. The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter time. There is that same expression again.

The Apostle is looking at conditions as they will prevail prior to the return of Christ to gather believers to himself. In the latter time, some shall depart from the faith. The departure from the faith involved a departure from the word of God, because the faith, the body of truth that believers hold, is derived solely from the word of God.

For the word of God is the source of our doctrine, the source of our body of truth that we call the faith. And the Apostle is not so much saying that men will depart from the faith principle to substitute a works principle for salvation, although that certainly is true. He is saying that men will abandon the word of God, and consequently will depart, set their ship adrift from the harbor, depart from the faith.

I scarcely need to remind you that this is that which characterizes so much of professing Christianity in our generation. Men can publicly repudiate the fundamental and cardinal doctrines of the word of God with impunity. They scoff at the biblical revelation that the Bible is the word of God, verbally inspired, inspired in its entirety, authoritative, absolutely without error, totally trustworthy.

Such is the claim that the Bible makes for itself that you would not have to think long to think of public figures in the religious world who openly scoff at the doctrine of a verbally, plenary inspired, infallible, and authoritative scripture. Men in high places in the religious world have openly and publicly repudiated the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ on the third day, and still hold high office. Men repudiate the doctrine that man is under condemnation because of sin, totally lost and separated from God and can be redeemed only by a substitutionary sacrifice.

I need not this morning document these statements that apostasy is widespread and rampant. Now, the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 4 tells us the origin of this apostasy. Men depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons.

Two phrases I want you to look at, seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. The seducing spirits refers to the false teachers. You remember the Apostle John, in writing to his little bairns, warns them in chapter 4 of his first epistle in the first verse, Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

The spirits of 1 John 4 are teachers who claim to be teachers of truth. Teachers come from God. But Paul says these spirits, these teachers, are false prophets.

And because of the prevalence of false prophets, John says the believer has a responsibility of testing the teaching of any man who calls himself a teacher. Now, what is the standard by which he tests the teacher? It is the word of God. Does he preach, thus saith the Lord, or does he preach, it seems to me? Now, the Apostle says that there will be spirits whom Paul says are seducing spirits.

They come with polish, with poise, with beautiful language that is pleasant to the ear, and when men follow these personalities and are swayed by their oratory, they may be moved away from the word of God because these false teachers are seductive. But then he shows the power behind these false teachers. These false teachers are promulgating doctrines of demons, or of devils.

Now, the Apostle is not saying they will preach about the devil. He is not referring here to this modern cult that substitutes the devil for Jesus Christ to make Satan the object of worship. He is saying that these false teachers, mild doctrines that were whispered into their ear by Satan, they pose as ministers of light, but they are ministers of darkness, for they are preaching not the truth of God, but the error of the liar and the deceiver.

I note that one of my colleagues this week is to speak on Satanic activity in the end times, and the activity of demons, and I will just anticipate something of what I'm sure he will be pointing out, that some of the greatest Satanic activity in the end times will take place in the pulpit, in the Sunday school class, where teachers who claim to be teachers of the truths of God will, because they have departed from the word of God, mouth the lies of the devil. Paul is warning us of that fact. You, therefore, have a responsibility, lest you be led into apostasy, to test every teacher's teaching, not by his prominence or prestige or his so-called authority or education, but test his teaching by the word of God itself.

Because, in the last times, men shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing teachers who mouth the doctrines of demons. Now I ask you next to go to Peter's second letter, 2 Peter 2, verses 1-4. While Paul in 2 Timothy gave us the atmosphere in which apostasy would flourish, and in 1 Timothy 4 spoke of the Satanic origin of this apostasy, in 2 Peter 2, verses 1-4, Peter speaks of the content of the teaching of the apostate.

Peter says, there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you. The false teachers of 2 Peter 2-1 are the same as the seductive spirits of 1 Timothy 4, 1 and 2. And so Peter is warning them again of the rise of this apostasy. They privily shall bring in damnable heresies.

Look at the word privily. It means secretly, stealthily, undercover, surreptitiously, bringing in teaching so cleverly that those who are taught will not realize that they are being taught truth unless they test that teaching by the word of God. How much of modern scholarship as it relates to the word of God is this subtle kind of teaching where a teacher would say, we used to believe, but now in the light of this or that or the other, archaeology or scholarship or the Dead Sea Scrolls or something else, will say, we now know that we were wrong and we today understand.

What is it? Under the guise of scholarship, it is a subtle attempt to undermine the faith in the word of God and the part of those who have been born by the Spirit of God. They will bring in damnable heresies, and they are called damnable heresies, not only because God condemns them, but because people following these departures from the faith will be condemned because of their unbelief in the word of God. Now let me, at the risk of my neck perhaps, illustrate how these false teachers operate from 2 Timothy, chapter 3. We stop short of the conclusion of his paragraph on apostasy, and I'm glad that there are a few, a goodly number of men here.

If you see me surrounded at the end of the hour, men, will you come to my rescue? The Apostle tells us the method by which these false teachers will insinuate themselves into a group so as to propagate their false doctrines. Verse 6, 2 Timothy 3, "...of this sort are they which creep into houses, lead captive silly women, laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." The Apostle is very frank as to the method that false teachers will use to propagate their false doctrines. They won't look for a group of businessmen whom they can persuade their error.

They will look for a group of women. Why? Once again, the word of God tells us that the women were liable to deception. In 1 Timothy 2, verses 13-14, Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression.

Paul recognized that man by creation is essentially a creature ruled by his mind. The woman by creation is essentially a creature ruled by her emotions or her heart, and because she is ruled by her emotions, she is more subject to deception than man, a creature ruled by his mind. And Paul says that, recognizing this principal trait, and thank God for it, that the false teachers will seek out a group of women, and they will insinuate or ingratiate themselves with these gatherings of women.

These women gather together because of an acknowledged guilt about sin. He's not dealing with a moral problem here, and these silly women are not prostitutes or some such thing as that. These are women under a burden of guilt who meet together to discuss the solution to their problem.

They are laden with sin. They are led away by a desire to relieve the burden of sin, but they do not come to the word of God to find a solution to the sin problem. They open up their doors to false teachers and give ear to false teachers.

And when these false teachers, with their syrupy, smooth approach, persuade these women that they have the truth, then these women begin to propagate the truth to their husbands, to lead their husbands into their same error. Now the apostle here in 2 Timothy 3 says that when apostasy begins and departure from the word of God becomes prominent, it will be as false teachers persuade gullible women that they have the truth and cause the women to depart from the word of God, and error or apostasy will propagate that way. Because of this liability to deception, the apostle gives instruction that the women are to be in subjection to their husbands and learn from their husbands the word of God, lest they be deceived and a

part of the apostasy.

I only need remind you as to the practicality of this observation that almost without exception, every false cult and religion that exists in the United States today was begun by a member of the female persuasion. You just look at the history of cults sometimes and observe that fact. Now getting back to the passage from which we departed in 2 Peter chapter 2, Peter says that these false teachers will secretly or stealthily bring in these damnable heresies, and you can expect them to work by persuading women of the truth of their error and then watching the truth spread from there.

What constitutes their denial? They will deny, first of all, the Lord that bought them. This has to do with a denial of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Jesus Christ.

I need not remind you that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ. I need not remind you that there is no other foundation that has been laid than that which God has laid, Jesus Christ. I need not remind you of the words of our Lord who said, I and no other am the way, I and no other am the truth, I and no other am the life.

To an audience such as this, I need not defend the doctrine of the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ, but that which is cardinal, central, pivotal to our faith will be that which is denied by the apostate. The second great area of denial is found in 2 Peter 2. Many shall follow their pernicious ways by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. I direct your attention to that phrase, the way of truth.

My understanding of that phrase is that this is a reference to the word of God which reveals the truth of God to us, so that those who deny the truth of God deny the person and work of Christ and deny the authority, integrity, infallibility of the word of God. I will suggest to you that Satan will let a man believe as much of the doctrine of the word of God as that man insists on believing up to these two cardinal points, the person and work of Christ and the authority and integrity and trustworthiness of the word of God. Satan will not concede those points.

He will concede anything else. But when a man accepts the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into this world to shed his blood as a substitutionary sacrifice for his sin, that man is saved. Satan cannot concede that doctrine.

When a man confesses that the word of God is infallible and our only rule and guide to faith and practice, when he commits himself to that doctrine, then he believes what the word of God says. And Satan cannot permit a man to accept the doctrine of the authority and infallibility and integrity of the scriptures. Anything else, Satan will let him believe.

Paul points out that apostasy will be primarily evident in these two areas, the person and work of Christ and the doctrine of scripture, and that apostate can be detected by their views of these two doctrines. To me it is intensely significant that in the theological world today the two major issues facing theologians, about which volumes of words are being poured out, are the areas of the person and work of Christ and the doctrine of the word of God. When I turn to the book of the Revelation, in chapter 2, I find the Apostle writing letters to the seven churches.

In the first church he addresses the church in Ephesus. In verse 2 he commends the church. He says, I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience, how thou canst not bear them which are evil.

Thou hast tried them that say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars. You see, the Ephesian church began by doing what Paul and Peter exhorted them to do. They had tested the teachers by the word of God.

They had found some to be false teachers, and they had repudiated them. You remember in Acts 20, verses 28 to 31, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, Paul had warned those elders that after his departure false prophets would arise, false shepherds who would destroy the flock. And the church at Ephesus was committed to preserving the truth that the Apostle had delivered to them, and they were on guard against any false teacher.

They tested every teacher who came to Ephesus by the word of God. But after that commendation, because of the way they had begun, John goes on in verse 4 and says, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast lost thy first love. Now, I'm suggesting that the problem in the Ephesian church was not a loss of love for Jesus Christ.

Not a loss of love for Jesus Christ. Their lost love was a lost love for the word of God. Dissolution and disruption began in the Ephesian church because they no longer tested the teachers by the word of God.

The word of God was taken from its place of preeminence and prominence. And the dissolution that John saw, and about which the Lord warned, was a dissolution because they did not heed the admonition cast every spirit. I find in Revelation 2 and verse 20 the ultimate consequence of this departure from the centrality of the word of God in preaching and teaching.

In his condemnation to the church of Thyatira, John writes, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication. Here was a false teacher who seductively came in to propagate false teaching that was contrary to the word of God. And the people in the church of Thyatira had accepted the false teacher and the false teaching.

There was no test of the teacher by the word of God, and apostasy set in. And in verse 22, John says, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds, and looking to the consummation of the age. John warns that those who depart from the faith and repudiate the centrality of the person and work of Christ and the authority and integrity and trustworthiness of the word of God will be unregenerate, and when the believers are raptured, those false propagators of doctrines of devils will be judged in the tribulation period.

God has delivered a body of truth through Jesus Christ, and that truth is recorded for us by inspiration in the word of God. That word is given as our anchor. It's the basis of a sinner's salvation, the basis for a believer's growth.

It's an anchor for the believers in a time of testing, but there is a constant danger that Satan will snatch away the word of God so that one is cast adrift from his anchor and make shipwrecked of his life. Therefore, the Apostle's exhortation is most applicable to us because of the doctrines of demons, or Satan's lies, that the word of God is not true, and that Jesus Christ is not the Savior. Test every teacher by the word of God to see if he be in the faith and to see if you be in the faith.

We thank thee, our Father, for the integrity and the authority of the word of God that has revealed the course of the age and has revealed the danger that confronts believers lest they conform to this age. Give

us such an unshakable conviction as to the authority and integrity of the scripture that we shall receive with joy all that is revealed in the scriptures concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. May we be grounded in the truth of God, that we can stand in dark and troublous days with a foundation of God standing sure as a hope, as an anchor of the soul.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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