

A Word to Apostates

by Steve Gallagher

Apostate Christians are those who have backslidden away from the Lord, and are in danger of being swept away by the overwhelming wave of deception in the end times church.

Duration: 43:31

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:31, 2 Timothy 3:5, Revelation 3:1-2

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of making a commitment to God in light of the current events happening in the world. He urges the audience to take a serious look at the news and recognize that time is running out. The speaker encourages individuals to make concrete commitments to change their lives and not just offer vague apologies to God. He highlights nine signs that indicate a lack of commitment to God, such as prioritizing money and goods, insincere worship, and indifference towards eternal matters. The sermon draws inspiration from the message to the Church of Sardis in Revelation 3, where Jesus warns the church about their spiritual deadness and calls them to wake up and strengthen what remains.

Transcript

I welcome you to the 2009 Pure Life Ministries Annual Conference. I need to give a little bit of a disclaimer up front here this morning. I'm going to say to you what the dentist says to me.

You may experience a little bit of discomfort this morning, but unlike the dentist, it will be given in love. My dentist is very mean. As I've been praying about this conference for the last few months, this thought came to me about the Church of Sardis in Revelations 3, and I want to read some verses.

Revelation 3, To the angel of the church in Sardis write, He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars says this, I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of my God. So remember what you have received and heard and keep it and repent.

Therefore, if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. I want to talk this morning about the predominant group in Sardis, which I

believe is a picture of the end times church.

I write about that in my book, *Standing Firm Through the Great Apostasy*. If you haven't read it, you might want to pick it up. But the predominant number of people in the end times church are not going to be on fire for the Lord, but are going to be dead spiritually or near death spiritually.

The title of the message this morning is *A Word to Apostate Christians*. I'm going to tell you right up front, I'm taking no prisoners. Because the hour is urgent.

And there is no group of people in this country that mean more to me than this group right here. Your souls mean too much for me to sit up here and try to win your approval and have everyone like me and crack jokes and have a nice fluffy little sermon that we can all walk out and feel good about. I'm giving this word exactly as the Lord gave it to me to give.

And I realize as well that there will be people who will be furious with me within the hour and will stomp out of here. And that's okay, I'm okay with that. Because there's too much at stake.

Now, I believe in this church there are three groups. There are those saints. As Jesus said, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments.

And there are people like that in this room right now. I know some of your lives. We just heard the testimony of one.

God has gotten a hold of you and done such a work inside of you at the cross that you have never been the same since. And God is going to be doing a wonderful thing through your life in the days ahead. You love the appearing of Christ.

You are waiting and longing for His return. You're not growing colder in the things of God. You're growing hotter in the things of God.

The second group are apostate Christians. Outwardly, you're doing all the right things. You're going to church.

You're going probably to a good church. You're keeping all the rules and so on. But inwardly, you have backslidden away from the Lord.

And you are in terrible, terrible danger of being swept away in an overwhelming wave of deception that's coming upon this earth and is already here right now. The waters of deception are growing deeper every day. And you are already neck deep in it.

You have a name that you're alive, but you are so close to drowning. And I fear for you. Now, I don't know who you are, and again, I'm not aiming anything.

I just know that you're here. That's between you and God. I know you're here.

And so this message is for you this morning. I am dedicating this word for you. It's a message that God burned into my heart several months ago, and I have prayed over it and fasted over it all these months, all this time, for this day.

God is going to speak to you this morning, if you have ears to hear. And then there's a third group. You've got the two extremes, and there's the third group we're in between, kind of undecided.

Now, there are those who have walked with the Lord. You have done well with the Lord. You know what it means to love the Lord, and you've just gotten off track in some ways.

You know, that's kind of one end of the spectrum all the way to the other end of the spectrum. You haven't crossed the line into apostasy yet, but you're headed for trouble if you don't turn things around. Now, you know, this message is not aimed at you.

This message is aimed at those apostate Christians, those people who are already in deep trouble. But I'm hoping that if you've kind of been going in the wrong direction, that something will happen for you this morning to kind of startle you and awaken you and get you back on track. That's my prayer.

All right. Now, the rest of this message I am directing at apostate Christians. Backsliding is a concept that is found throughout Scripture, Old Testament, New Testament stories, direct statements.

I mean, all the way through Scripture, it's talked about. In fact, in the book of First Timothy alone, Paul talks about those in the last days who would fall away from the faith. He spoke of those who have suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

Those who have denied the faith. Those who have wandered away from the faith. And finally, those who have gone astray from the faith.

And when I did the study for this book, I studied for about two years this whole concept of apostasy and so on. And the thing that shocked me and startled me was the reality that it would be the predominant. That it would be the predominant characteristic of the end times church.

Not a small group over here who are going to church but are kind of messing up. No, the predominant. The overwhelming majority.

I was appalled when I started to realize what Scripture says about the end times church. Because it meant people who I care about are on the verge of being forever lost. I want to talk about three signs of an apostate Christian.

Lifelessness, lovelessness and lawlessness. We'll start with this one. First one, lifelessness.

You have a name that you're alive. The outward semblance of Christianity is still very much intact in your life. All the outward stuff is there.

You know, and if someone that doesn't really know you or doesn't have much discernment looked at your life. Oh yeah, brother so and so, they're a Christian. Sister so and so, they're a Christian.

Just like what you just heard with sister Judy. You know, yeah, you look at their life. They're not doing all terrible things or whatever.

They're in church. You know, they're identifying themselves with the evangelical movement. But you know, it's a lot like a cancer patient who refuses the doctor's treatment.

You know, the doctor keeps trying to reason with the person and say, You don't understand. You are near death. The cancer has raced through your body.

We can still turn it around if you'll start taking the chemo treatments and so on. We can still turn this thing around. We can still save your life.

And the person sitting there with some kind of a Pollyanna delusion and just kind of smiling and just walks out unconcerned. You know, if you study the life of Christ in the Gospels, you will find that Jesus was very confronting. We like the nice little Jesus who gives us all the things we want and blesses us and loves on us and makes us feel good about ourselves.

We like that kind of Jesus. But that isn't the Jesus of the Bible. He is love incarnate.

Absolutely. But it isn't this pathetic, weak-kneed little thing. It's a passion.

And He wants to see people saved. And He hasn't changed. Do you think there's one Jesus that was back in those days? Well, I guess, you know, He was going to die, so He was in kind of a bad mood or something.

No. He's the same Savior today. We just heard a testimony of Jesus coming to a woman and confronting her because she was playing games spiritually, playing church.

He hasn't changed. He sees inside what's going on inside of you. He sees the loves of your heart, where your affections really are, where your treasures really are.

He sees it all. He sees the motives for your actions, why you do the things you do. He sees the attitudes.

He sees the idols that have been built up in your hearts over the years. Those eyes of fire. The reality is, if you're a Christian, God is going to chasten you.

If you're a Christian, God is going to chasten you. 2 Timothy 3, that passage of Scripture, it's one of the pictures of the end-time church. And Paul says, you have a form of godliness.

Yes, you keep the evangelical list of do's and don'ts. You're very careful to make sure that you're doing all the things that you're supposed to do. And you're very careful that you're not doing the things you're not supposed to do.

You know, the evangelical church has its list. It's more or less built on Scripture. The only problem with it is there's a lot missing.

It's all built to cater to the American lifestyle of me first. And so, verses that talk about heart issues and talk about where your heart really is and the way you're living your life and so on, those are conveniently ignored or kind of brushed aside. But you keep that list, that list of evangelical do's and don'ts, and you're fluent in Christianese.

You know, the reality is, if you didn't have a form of godliness, you couldn't handle it because your conscience would rage within you. I have told people in the past, and I know it's not politically correct, people don't like to hear this kind of talk, but I have told people it would be better if you would just backslide completely, throw off all semblance of Christianity, and go give yourself over to where your heart really is. It would be better for you if you would just do that.

And to continue going in the church, deceiving yourself, and infecting others around you with your faithlessness, your corruption. We keep our form of godliness intact because it's the only thing that we can hang on to when our conscience starts trying to tell us where we're really at, when the Holy Spirit starts moving in. We have to have the form of godliness, something to point to.

We do just enough to deceive ourselves. Paul said they would have a form of godliness, but deny the power of the Holy Spirit. Deny it.

It means, really a picture of it is the Holy Spirit is trying to move into your heart and trying to speak to you, but you deny entrance to the Holy Spirit. No, you cannot come in here. I am not interested in what you have to say.

We heap unto ourselves teachers who will scratch our itching ears. We love to hear preachers who will just give us nice little sermonettes. Teach us nice little things about Christianity, but never really confront us about the sinfulness, the selfishness in our lives.

We like mild-mannered preachers who are politically correct and know how to be gracious in their words and so on. And we gather around ourselves friends who will flatter us. Friends that don't really care about us.

You know, a true friend will confront you in your sin. Many of you have had people like that, and you don't like to be talked to like that, so you avoid those people who will tell you the truth. There's a word from the Apostle Paul written almost 2,000 years ago to you apostate Christians who are in this room this morning.

It comes out of 2 Thessalonians 2. He says you will perish because you did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason, God will send upon you a deluding influence so that you will believe what is false. In other words, God is going to give you over.

He's going to give you over. If you keep insisting on believing lies about yourself, if you keep insisting on avoiding the truth, the time is going to come when He is going to give you over to a deluding influence. The truth is you hate the truth if it exposes what's really going on inside because you're full of pride.

Nobody can tell you anything. And every time God starts to put His finger on what's going on inside your heart, up go the walls and you deny Him. You resist His every effort.

You grieve this Holy Spirit who loves you. And you finally are successful to completely quench the Spirit's voice in your life. The truth is and the reality is that spiritual life comes from one place only, Calvary.

That's where all spiritual life comes from, Calvary. You just heard a testimony of someone who went to Calvary. Calvary represents the death of the self-life and coming into Christ's life.

Calvary represents the end of self-rule and coming into Christ's rule. Calvary means acknowledging what you are like with a sincere heart. Calvary means taking full responsibility for the sin in your life.

Calvary means that you grieve over the ugliness of your sin. Calvary means you repent of it. You commit yourself to changing.

But we don't hear much about this anymore in the church unless it's kept on nice superficial terms. You all know that I'm not mad at you, right? I'm a little intense this morning, but I'm not mad at you. You all look kind of beaten down.

I don't mean to beat up on you. It's really only for a number of people anyway. When the Lord gave the New Covenant, He said in Ezekiel 36, He said, Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations.

That attitude is always present in true conversions. Matthew Henry said, Self-love is at the bottom of sin, but self-loathing is ever the companion of true repentance. William Law said, Self-hatred, self-contempt, and self-denial are as normal to the newborn believer as self-love, self-esteem, and self-seeking are to the unbeliever.

I don't see books like that down at the Christian bookstore. Charles Spurgeon said, All real repentance is joined with holy sorrow and self-loathing. But repentance has comfort in it.

The door of repentance opens into the halls of joy. We just heard a wonderful testimony of that. He went on to say, When God is seen with admiration, then of necessity we are filled with self-loathing.

The more you appreciate God, the more you will depreciate yourself. While the thought of God rises higher and higher and higher, you also will sink lower and lower in your own esteem. The word used by Job, I abhor myself, is a strong one.

It might be paraphrased thus, I nauseate myself. I am disgusted with myself. I cast forth from my soul every proud thought of myself.

Cast it out from me as a sickening and intolerable thing. Would to God that we had preachers like that today. Alright, the second sign is lovelessness.

In 2 Timothy 3, again, Paul said that these people are unloving and that they're lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God or rather than lovers of God. And in Matthew 24, there's a little section in there where Jesus, again, is addressing the end times church, and He said, Most people, most, their love would grow cold. Now, love is an interesting thing.

You know, I talk about in sexual idolatry in the opening chapter there, about idolatry and just how we have been created in such a way that we are going to worship something or another. I mean, it's just that's the way we've been created, is to give our devotion to something. And, you know, I make the point there that most people have given their devotion to all kinds of things, you know, and have idols that have just formed up inside their hearts over the years and so on.

But the thing is, with loving God, it's a different sort of dynamic. You know, you can have several idols all at once, and they don't conflict with each other, really. You can love your career, your family, your sports team, your wardrobe.

You can love all kinds of different things all at the same time. But it isn't that way with the Lord. The reason you can do that is because when self is on the throne, there's plenty of room for idols because it's all built in self-love.

But when God is on the throne, it's a completely different dynamic. There's only room for one love, and it is the love that's due to God alone. That's what Deuteronomy meant.

I mean, with Moses in Deuteronomy, when he said, The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength. That's what happens when you've been converted and Jesus Christ is on your throne. The conflict is gone.

That conflict is no longer there. It doesn't mean that you don't have struggles with things and so on. I know Judy's had her struggles with different issues over the years, but there is a constant movement in a direction towards the Lord that grows as you mature as a believer.

When God is on the throne, when Jesus Christ is on the throne, Jesus said it's impossible to serve God in mammon. It's impossible. But people insist on doing it, thinking they're doing it, and they're not.

They're just deceiving themselves. Apostate Christians don't love God. They kind of like him.

The truth is they love other things. You know, the only difference between an apostate Christian and a total heathen is form of godliness, because inside there really is no difference. An apostate Christian has the same values.

They love the same things as the heathen loves. Their heart, their treasure of their heart is in the same sorts of things. They're lovers of pleasure.

They love entertainment and all of it. That's really where their hearts are at. The only difference really is the outward.

An apostate Christian, you know, holds on to the form of godliness. That's the only difference. For many, maybe you've moved close to the Lord at one time or whatever, but you've allowed the things of this world to crowd in on your life.

And so your spiritual life, if there was one, I don't know how that works exactly spiritually. I'll leave that to the theologians. But if you had some kind of a spiritual life, it begins to dry up and wither away.

And before you know it, you have become a mechanical Christian. Everything is done mechanically. There's no affection for the Lord in what you're doing.

You're just kind of going through the motions. You're dying. That's what it is.

You're dying inside. Now, you know, again, I need to say this, that even people who have really come to the Lord have their dry times. I have my dry times, you know, and that's to be expected.

And there's times that you just need to, you know, be encouraged and you need the refreshing from the Lord and so on. It doesn't mean you're apostate or near apostasy. I'm not saying that.

You know, there are those times when we have struggles, we get off track a little bit. But there's a difference between someone who's the basic flow of their life is living for self and someone who's the basic flow of their life is to live for God, to please God. There's a difference between the two.

In my book, Intoxicated with Babylon, I said this, Nothing will deaden a person's spiritual appetite like the spirit of this world. It agitates the flesh and shuts out the Holy Spirit. The hunger deep within a believer's spirit for the satisfying presence of God is eclipsed by the soul's lust for entertainment.

The things of this world dull a person's spiritual sensitivity. Even believers with the best of intentions find that their passion for God wanes in the polluted atmosphere of Babylon. It is interesting how wide awake we are when it comes to our life in Babylon.

When it comes to Mammon, we rise early and stay up late. As one writer put it, the final epitaph of this person's life could be summed up thus, He might have been a saint of God, but alas, he has gained the world, he has lost his soul. The third sign of apostasy is lawlessness.

Are you okay? You're all so quiet. Okay, I got one guy that told me to preach and that's all I need. 2 Thessalonians 2, where Paul talks about the apostasy and he talks about the man of lawlessness who's the Antichrist.

He talks about the mystery of lawlessness. There's something involved with the apostasy that is very tied in with this whole spiritual dynamic of lawlessness. Jesus, again, in Matthew 24, it's the same verse, warned about that lawless attitude that brings about coldness of heart towards God and the things of God.

The secular Greek word for apostasy, apostasia, really in the secular Greek it just is another word for insurrection. That's really what it means. And in fact, some of the translations don't call it the great apostasy, they call it the great rebellion.

Because that's really what's going on. And you know, that is the spirit of Antichrist is pushing forth that spirit in the church now. This spirit of lawlessness that, you know, and you see it in a lot of teachings.

It's subtle, you have to have discernment. But it's there in a lot of teachings and the basic message of the teaching and it can be packaged in different ways for different denominational groups and so on. But the basic underlying principle is this.

You don't have to obey God. You don't have to obey God. He doesn't expect you to obey Him.

And that's packaged in a lot of different ways. Let me tell you, that is the spirit of Antichrist. Because the spirit of the living God would never tell you that you don't have to obey Him.

The psalmist said, you know, got a sight of the spirit in Psalm 2. I mean, it was fulfilled in Jesus' time and His first time here. But it was also a foreshadowing of the end times when there's an attitude and a spirit and atmosphere that's growing stronger and stronger in the earth. He said, the kings of the earth take their stand.

And you see that in the book of Revelation. The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointing saying, let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us. We don't want to be ruled by anyone.

I don't want anybody telling me what to do. And that is in the hearts of a lot of people who confess themselves to be Christians. You know, apostate Christians are willing to obey God up to a certain point.

They're willing to go along with the program as long as He doesn't put His finger on that thing that they don't want to give up or whatever it might be, whatever the case is. They're willing to obey, you know, outwardly as long as it doesn't reach down into the inner recesses of their heart. Their submission is superficial and insincere.

Inside their heart, they're just as rebellious and unsubmitted as any heathen. Apostates are rebels, just like their master. You know what the issue is? It's control.

That's what the issue is. It's control. We just heard it in this testimony.

It was such a perfect picture of what I'm talking about. That's what the issue is. Who is going to control my life? Who's going to control my life? When self is on the throne, you do not easily give up that throne.

We like to watch these movies about Antichrist, you know, these ridiculous, nonsensical, end-time movies that are based in fiction and mostly loosely based around Scripture. And there is going to be an Antichrist, and I believe he's alive now, and I believe he's going to be emerging soon. But, you know, we like to point the finger at someone like that, and he's this monster and all of this stuff.

But the reality is, we're in the same spirit. That's the reality. Self is on the throne.

It might as well be the devil on the throne. Apostates have never surrendered control of their lives. They've never submitted to God's authority.

They've never been to Calvary. A word that's hardly found in Scripture, but yet the concept is throughout the Bible, and it's an enormously important word. In fact, I would say everything hinges on it, really.

The word is sincerity. That's the word, sincerity. Because when you are sincere before God, you let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

You are going to be honest with yourself. You're going to do an inventory of yourself, and you're going to be truthful about yourself. But if you're insincere, you'll find one way or another to slide out from anything that is convicting or whatever.

But let's just look at these 19 signs that you're heading into the great apostasy. 1. Prayer is either nonexistent or mechanical. 2. You know the word, but you don't really live it.

3. Earnest thoughts about eternal things are no longer regular and gripping. 4. Sins of the body and of the mind can be indulged in without an uproar in your conscience. 5. Aspirations for Christlike holiness have ceased to be dominant in your mind.

6. The acquisition of money and goods takes up a major part of your thinking. 7. You can sing worship psalms without really meaning what they express. 8. You can hear eternal issues treated flippantly and not be moved to indignation.

9. Your main concerns are of your temporal and earthly life. 10. Conflicts with others are not a major concern to you.

11. You no longer hunger for a deeper life in God. 12.

You don't live with a full and grateful heart. 13. You have little concern over and make little effort to meet the needs of others.

14. You always see your level of spirituality in positive terms. 15.

You are more concerned about your pet doctrines than you are people's lives. 16. Sports, recreation and entertainment are a large and necessary part of your life.

17. You are more concerned with your image than with the reality of your life with God. 18.

You are full of bitterness or criticism or pride or covetousness or lust. 19. You have a head full of knowledge and a heart of stone.

I'm hoping that that will give you a sense of where you're at. Well, I suppose the main heart we had of deciding to start this conference years ago was to give people an opportunity to come back to the place where they met God and had an encounter with God and to get refreshed and to be challenged and so on. And I know, like I said before, there are many godly saints in this place.

The thing is about sincerity, altar calls are funny because the way it often happens is the people who need to be at the altar the most are sitting there smugly in their chairs thinking they're doing great and the people who least need to be at the altar are usually the ones up here throwing themselves before God, pleading for mercy. But the reality is in this group is that most of you here are somewhere in that in-between group and I know that. And you know some that maybe you've been challenged this morning to shake it up a little bit and to get back on track.

You see you've gotten sloppy spiritually and you've gotten off track and maybe your life with God has become kind of mechanical and you've lost the fire, you've lost the passion, you've lost the love. And you've allowed the things of the world to crowd into your life. You've been making little alliances with the world and just kind of giving over in little ways here and there and before you know it, your spiritual life, your hunger for God has waned and is drying up and withering away.

This would be a good time to get on your face before God. This would be a good time to get on your face before God. To make a commitment to Him.

You know all we've got to do is look at the news. What's it going to take? All we've got to do is look at what's happening in the news. I know most of it's lies and it's all part of the deception, the way it's packaged and presented to us.

But can't you see in the news what's happening? The time is growing short. How long? How long will we continue to play games? How long will we continue? Some of you need to just get before God and make a commitment about some concrete things in your life. Coming up and having some kind of a vague, Oh Lord, I'm sorry, I know I need to do better.

That's not going to do it for you, loved ones. That's not going to do it for you. What you need to do is, that needs to be there, but you also need to say, Oh God, I know this needs to go.

Oh God, I know I need to change this. Oh God, I promise you from this day forward something is going to be different in the way that I handle this. Here is your opportunity now.

You need to change your lifestyle as you now live it. Something needs to change. And so I'm going to just open this altar up and I'm going to ask you, if you feel like you need to do business with God, now is your time to run to Calvary.

Some of you need to run to Calvary. You have not really come to Calvary. Some of you have been playing games and been around the princes of Christianity your whole life, but you have never really submitted and surrendered.

Some of you need to make that consecration this morning as an act of your will, once and for all, to nail self to the cross. No longer, no longer can I allow self to rule my life. It's going to take me into hell.

Some of you need to get serious with God for the first time. I know many of you, again, I know many of you, you just need to get back on track. I understand.

But there are others in here I fear for you, loved ones. If you can be at a Pure Life Ministries conference and sit in that seat, stony-hearted, unmoved, what hope is there for you?

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