

APOSTASY

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(Edited transcript of sermon preached October 26, 2008)

The message this morning is entitled "Apostasy." I've been thinking about this for a couple of weeks. As a matter of fact, I read an article that was sent to me in the mail not long ago and got me on this subject and studying it. I get many resources through the mail, and I get one through the Internet. I get a Friday newsletter that deals a lot with what's going on in the churches today. I'm not going to get into the particulars this morning, but there is much apostasy across our land in the church of Jesus Christ.

On my way to Mississippi two months ago, a man called me. He's on our mailing list, and he's out of Virginia. He began speaking to me about what was going on in his church. And between the music, the youth, the compromise and the devaluing, I guess, of the doctrines and truths of the Word of God, a number of things have led me to speak on this this morning.

As we begin here in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, keep in mind that when we speak of apostasy, apostasy can apply to an individual, it can apply to a church as a whole, or it can apply to a nation. Second Thessalonians, chapter 2, verses 1 through 4 says:

- (1) Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
- (2) That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
- (3) Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
- (4) Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Now, Father, we thank you this morning for your Word. We thank you for the privilege that you've given us to assemble together here this day. And, dear God, we ask your anointing and blessing upon the reading of Thy Scripture. We pray, God, Lord, that you would meet with us today. Lord, we pray that you would teach us. We pray that you would lead and guide us in truth. Lord, help us to rightly divide the Word of Truth, for we ask all of these things in Jesus Christ's name, we pray, Amen.

You may be seated. Now, I'm going to just kind of make a few comments about the context in just a moment, but I want to begin our message this morning on apostasy out of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, reading in verse 3. And, again, I'll make a comment or two on the context in just a moment. The apostle Paul said in verse 3, "**And let no man deceive you by any means for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first . . .**" Now, the Greek word that's translated "falling away" appears, I believe, twice in the Word of God. I believe it appears again in Acts 21, verse 21. But in verse 3, the Greek word here for "falling away" is a-p-o-s-t-a-s-i-a. Our English word "apostasy" is not in the Authorized Version, but it is a legitimate word, and this English word is derived from this Greek word that's translated "falling away."

Now, I want to speak to you this morning about apostasy. And you ask, "What does it mean?" Well, it means falling away. I can give you many synonyms, but it basically means falling away, and it has to do with departing, a defection from the truth, a desertion or abandonment of the things of God. It has to do with a revolt or a rebellion or withdrawing from God and His Word. Now, this word is especially associated with turning from the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and we're going to see that.

When we speak of apostasy, we are not talking about backsliding, and I'll say a little bit more about that in a few moments. It is far more extreme than just simply backsliding. One author said it is a deliberate act of repudiation. The Webster's 1828 dictionary says it is an abandonment of what one has professed, a total desertion or departure from one's faith or religion. In other words, when we think of backsliding, we think of somebody who does not deny Jesus Christ as their Savior, but they fall into sin; they stumble into sin; they backslide; they make some mistakes. But when we think of apostasy, we're talking about someone who has professed faith in Jesus Christ. I did not say they were saved, but they have **professed** faith in Jesus Christ, taken a stand, a public stand for the Lord and His Word and then totally and completely turned their back on Jesus Christ and His Word. So that's the idea that we see when we come to this subject. It is not spiritual error. It is not heresy. It's not even being an atheist necessarily, but it's someone who has supposedly come into the faith and then taken a total about-face and denies the principles and truths of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let's talk about the context here just for a moment; and, of course, there was apostasy in the first century. I'm going to talk about the development of apostasy in just a moment, but first of all, the definition. And, again, he says here in verses 1 and 2, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, ²That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." Now, this church was going through much persecution, and they were being persecuted for their faith. We read about that in chapter 1. And the apostle is telling them to be patient and wait and endure the persecution and that the Lord one day will come back in flaming fire taking vengeance upon the apostates, upon those who deny the Lord, that do not recognize Him as Lord and Savior.

So there was some controversy going on in this church about the timing of the Lord's coming, and verse 1 is talking about Jesus Christ's coming and our gathering together unto Him, and he says in verse 2, "Don't be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from us." He's saying, "Now, we've not written a letter in reference to this," and he said, "Be not troubled as that the day of Christ is at hand," but, he says in verses 3 and 4, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day"— that is, the day of Christ— "shall not come except there come a falling away first" — that is, apostasy, a forsaking of the truth — "and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ⁴Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." And we read in verse 7, "the mystery of iniquity." That is the exact opposite of the mystery of godliness that we'll read about in a few moments. He says here in verse 7, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work . . .," that is, in the days of the apostles. In the days of Jesus Christ there was already apostasy among them. He said, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." And then some other verses here describe some things

about those who believe not and how they will be given a strong delusion that they should believe a lie and would be damned.

Now, we're talking about the definition of apostasy, and it's associated here with the mystery of iniquity, that is, that system of evil that is opposing God and His Word. So an apostate is somebody who rejects God's Word and no longer accepts His Word, and we're going to see in the Bible that, with the apostate, there is no repentance or salvation for them according to the book of Hebrews. We're not talking now about somebody who's backslidden. We're not talking about somebody who's made a mistake or that has fallen and needs to be lifted back up, but we're talking about someone who has supposedly believed the truth and then turned their back on God and His Word. And this is not even dealing with ignorance or a lack of knowledge. It's not dealing with a backslider. It's not even dealing with heresy, but it's dealing with apostasy, those who have professed to believe the truth and then turned their back upon it.

I want you to turn with me, please, to Romans, chapter 1, and let's begin reading from about verse 18. Now, obviously, there are steps, I'm sure, to apostasy, and there are many verses throughout the entire Bible that would deal with apostasy. We could probably include Judas as an apostate. He wasn't saved, but he was with the disciples and was trained by the Lord and so forth. We could probably call him an apostate. In 1 Timothy, chapter 1, verses 19 and 20, there are two men who are mentioned there by name, Hymenaeus and Alexander. Without any doubt they could be classified as apostates. And then we could probably include Esau. We could include Korah in the Old Testament. We could include Cain in Genesis, chapter 4, and maybe Demas in 1 Timothy 4, verse 10. And, again, we could go through a number of individuals in Scripture who would fit into this category.

Secondly, I want us to consider the development of apostasy, and the reason I want to say it this way is the fact that there has always existed apostasy in every generation. Now, we can look around us and things are bad. We can say there's a great falling away, but I want you to understand that, in every generation, there has been apostasy — and especially throughout church history. There has always been apostasy. Now, it is true that it will intensify and will increase, and it will grow and become more prevalent, but there has always been apostasy. It originated with Satan in Heaven as he apostatized from God and His throne. The first victims of apostasy in the Bible were Adam and Eve. Satan was apostate, and Adam and Eve became the victims. The first one on earth to promote apostasy that we know of in the Scripture was Cain. We read about that in Genesis, chapter 4.

So we know that there was apostasy in the days of Noah. As a matter of fact, if we read very closely in Genesis 6, 7, and 8, it was because of apostasy that judgment came upon the world during that time, and as we read through the Old Testament, we see throughout Israel's history that there was apostasy among the nation of Israel. We see that over and over again throughout the Bible. Now, as we come to Romans, chapter 1, I'm coming here to read a few verses describing mankind in general — or maybe we could call it the nations throughout history — and see the development of apostasy. Again, we see apostasy from the Garden of Eden all the way through the Old Testament. We see it in our times. So what I'm trying to say to you is that it's always been around from the beginning, and it always will be

around until Jesus Christ establishes His Kingdom, till He comes for His church, and in a few moments, we're going to read some verses describing the apostasy in the last days.

Now, let's look at just mankind in general and how man willfully rejected God's truth throughout the centuries. I'm going to be reading from Romans, chapter 1, verse 18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.” Now, that's apostasy, these men holding the truth in unrighteousness. He's saying this is apostasy. He goes on to say in verses 19 through 23: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. ²⁰For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: ²¹Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. ²²Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ²³And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man. . .” So we see throughout the history of mankind and among the nations there has been apostasy. Those who have known God and know something about God turn their backs upon God, and the Bible says in verse 18 that they held the truth in unrighteousness.

Notice with me that as we come down toward the end of this chapter, verse 28 through verse 32, we're going to see that apostasy is followed by judgment. I'm skipping several verses, but this entire chapter is dealing with the downward steps in apostasy from being unthankful and refusing to glorify God to gross sins that are mentioned in the chapter. Verses 28 through the end of the chapter make reference to this. Verse 28 says, “And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to” — Notice — “a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient,” and he begins listing their sins in verses 29, 30, and 31, and he said in verse 32 in reference to these people, “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

Now, I want you to think about what's being said here in this passage. The Bible is telling us that throughout the history of mankind, there has been apostasy in every age. Please understand that. So, first of all, we've talked about the definition of apostasy — and, again, it is not backsliding; that's another topic. But apostasy has to do with somebody professing faith in the Lord and making a public stand, and then totally denying that profession; and, again, we're going to see that more later as we get into the book of Hebrews. Now, he says here in verse 32 of Romans, chapter 1, “Who knowing the judgment of God. . .” So I'm saying to you that God's judgment comes upon the apostate. Those who have gone into apostasy, God's judgment is upon them.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy, chapter 4. I'm going to begin reading from verse 1. I'm going to give you a number of references that mention the last days. Now, there are a number of areas where we could say that there's apostasy across our land, but I don't want to get into particulars this morning. I'm going to just make a few brief statements, because I want to stay with the Scriptures and I want to give you as many verses as we have time for to let you be able to study this particular subject on your own; and I believe, without any doubt, that if we go to the Scriptures and believe the Scriptures, we will be able to see what apostasy is and what it is not once we understand the truth.

So we see the development of apostasy. We saw it in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve became the victims of apostasy. Cain promoted apostasy. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel we see apostates among the people of God. And we see in Romans, chapter 1, that the nations were unthankful; they would not glorify God. They knew that God existed. They knew that He was real, and yet they changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and they went into apostasy and gross sin, and God's judgment is upon that.

But there are many areas of apostasy that we can consider today that most people never think about. One, in my opinion, is simply the Bible versions in the English language. Now, you know that at least once or twice a year I preach to you on why I believe that the Authorized Version is the Word of God. Now, I'm just afraid to doubt it. I believe it's God's Word. I believe every jot and every tittle is God's Word. But when you consider in the time in which we live that there are over 150 English translations on the market — and I have many of them in my office — and when you sit down and consider them and consider the differences between them and the Book that I'm preaching from this morning, to me, I feel like there is apostasy that's even gotten into the translations of the Bible.

I give you an example. I was preaching one time in Columbia, New Jersey. I was pastoring in Pennsylvania, and I drove to Columbia, New Jersey. We started a church in a home on a Friday night. I trained a man, and he took it over and began pastoring this church, but I went there for a year and a half on Friday nights preaching in this home as we were trying to form this church, and the very first night I was there, I preached on two issues, one salvation — because I didn't know any of the people. I had never been in this state before in my life, so we put this thing together, and I preached on salvation, and then I preached on the foundation that we're going to begin this work with, and that is the Authorized Version being the Word of God. The man came to me, and he was offended by the fact that I said that, and I noticed in his hand he was carrying an NIV, a New International Version. He said, "I'm offended at that. What's wrong with my Bible?" I said, "Turn to Acts 8:37, and let's compare notes out of the Bibles." He couldn't find it. Why? Because it's not there. Acts 8:37, a verse dealing with the deity of Christ and a man getting saved, is totally missing from that Bible. And he said, "It's not here." I said, "True," and I said, "There are at least 20 of those verses that are missing," and I said, "There are 64,000 words taken out of that Bible." He handed it to me, and he said, "Get me a real Bible." He was offended at first.

Now, here's the thing, whatever you believe on this. I am afraid to correct or change or mess with God's Word. I believe that when you mess with His Word, He will mess with you. I just believe that. So which Bible on the market today is from the right Greek manuscripts? — That's one question that needs to be asked — and which English translation exalts the Lord Jesus Christ and upholds His deity and the work in the atonement that He accomplished? There's not one in America that does that like the Authorized Version. Do you know that there are many translations that take the word "virgin" out pertaining to the virgin birth? They take His deity out. As a matter of fact, we're going to read a verse in 1 Timothy where most of the translations take the word "God" out where it says, "God was manifest in the flesh." Nearly all English translations take the word "God" out to where you don't even know who was manifest in the flesh. Jesus Christ was manifest in the flesh. So I'm saying to you that there is apostasy among God's people today even with Bible translations.

Now, what about the music that is in our churches across our land? There were three complaints this week over music in churches and the things that are going on — entertainment, programs, dramas, plays, contemporary music — all these kinds of things. I was at a business during this week, and a man came to me and wanted to talk to me. As a matter of fact, he wanted to talk to me about the church here a little bit. I'm not going to tell you where he goes to church, but he began to tell me, "You know what?" He said, "Let me tell you about the music in our church now. Let me tell you about how the youth are exalted and the youth groups are carried around to all these events and things." He said, "Let me tell you about what we're doing to try to get a crowd in our church." Apostasy is across our land, and there are many today who are turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.

About three years ago, there was a Presbyterian minister who came with his girlfriend to an abortion clinic in Jackson, Mississippi, to get an abortion quoting verses from the Bible on grace, saved by grace. Yes, this happened, and this happened right before we shut down this other abortion clinic in Mobile. This happened in Jackson, Mississippi. So what am I saying? Apostasy is across our land. Doctrine doesn't matter anymore. It's thrown out the door. Truth is not important to many people anymore. The prosperity gospel is being preached today by many. Radio and television preachers are preaching it. Many of the seminaries are denying truths that are in the Word of God. The new age is into many churches today. Separation is thrown out the door. I mean, in many churches today the issue of covering up our nakedness and clothing ourselves as God would have us to be clothed basically means nothing to most people, and if you preach on dress standards, you are called a legalist.

So what are we saying? We're saying that homosexuality is being condoned in the churches today. There are many women now going into the ministry and becoming preachers. The ecumenical movement. Many churches are filled with Masons. I told somebody, "I'm a real mason," and then I clarified that by saying a brick mason. How many of you have ever studied Masonry? There are a lot of deacons and pastors in churches who are a part of the Masonic Lodge. And we're coming up on an election in a week or so, and you know the debate that goes on: "Who are you voting for?" and, "Who should be in office?" Well, first of all, we don't have anybody who deserves to be in office, to begin with — and I do pray for this country. I pray for the leaders and so forth, but I'm just going to tell you this right now. I don't even have to go to the belief system of the woman who's running for office. You know, I respect women and we honor women, but God has said in His Word that they are not to lead a home or a nation or a church. Now, that's very plain in the Scriptures, so I don't have to go to the belief system of the woman who's running for office and deal with the fact that she's a feminist and brags about it and that she condones sodomy and other things. I don't even have to go to the belief system. I'm simply saying to you this morning that when we think of the word "apostasy," we're talking about a denial of truth, a denial of God's Word in the time in which we live — and, again, this is something that developed. It's always been. There was apostasy in Jesus' day and Paul's day and Peter's day, and he said this will increase and it would grow throughout the church age.

Let me begin reading in 2 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 1. And, again, I just want to point these verses out to you this morning because there are a number of messages in these. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:1, "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke,

exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Now, why is he to do this? He said, ³“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; ⁴And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” In the majority of churches today, it's one story after another, one program after another and so forth, and Paul is telling Timothy to preach the word, be instant in season, reprove, rebuke and exhort, he says, for the time is going to come when people are not wanting the truth.

I want you to notice the phrases "last days," "latter days," or "the last time" in 2 Timothy, chapter 3. Notice how this is worded. I'm going to read from verses one through about verse fourteen. Paul is dealing with apostasy in the last days. We're going to come back later in the message and look at verses 15, 16, and 17, but he said in verse 1 of 2 Timothy 3, ¹“This know also, that in the last days...” Now, I want to give you a few verses to point out actually what the last days are. Many people ask, "Are we in the last days?" Well, yes, but I want you to understand that the last days began in the days of Jesus Christ and in the days of Peter and Paul, so we're in the last days of the last days. But the last days began in the first century, and there was apostasy there in the first century, and Paul is saying that as you go through church history or the church age or whatever you want to call it, all this is going to do is intensify, be more magnified as we get closer to the coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, notice what he says here. And as I read this, keep in mind that the last days refer to the time between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus Christ. You ask, "How do you know that?" Glad you asked. On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter and the twelve stand up and preach in different languages to hundreds and thousands of Jews on the feast day. The tongues of the individuals are preaching the Gospel, and there are people who are saying, "What is going on?" And Peter says in Acts 2:14 to 18, ¹⁴“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: ¹⁵For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; ¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . .” I'm going to stop reading right there. Notice, Pentecost is referred to as “the last days.” Peter is quoting from the book of Joel, and he said "in the last days." In other words, between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming, these are the last day. You say, "Well, it's been nearly 2,000 years." But it's still the last days.

Let me read one other passage before I read in Timothy. Listen to how it's worded in Hebrews, chapter 1. It's used, by the way, a number of times in the Scripture. Yes, we are in the last days. We're in the latter part of the last days, probably. But the last days began in the first century. Listen to Hebrews, chapter 1. I'm going to be reading verses one and two. It says, ¹“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, ²Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his Son* . . .” It says that “in these last days” God spoke to us by His Son, Jesus Christ. So we're living in the last days. In 2 Timothy, chapter 3 — and, again, there are many sermons in these verses, so let me just read them and briefly comment on them. But notice the things that characterize or mark the last days. Verse 1 says, ¹“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” — difficult times, hard times. God's people who have stood for the Word and have not apostatized have always had to pay the price. Paul says in verses 2 to 5 of 2 Timothy, chapter 3, ²“For men shall be lovers of their own selves,

covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, ⁴Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures” — Does that sound like America today? — “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; ⁵Having a form of godliness” — We’re talking about apostasy; we’re talking about apostates — “Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” Paul goes on in this chapter to elaborate on that.

So we see the development of apostasy, not only throughout the Bible, but especially in the last days and throughout what we may refer to as church history. So the apostasy that we’re preaching on this morning was foretold by Jesus Christ. It was confirmed by Paul and Peter and John and Jude and the other apostles that this would be true in our time in which we live. John Owens, the Puritan, made this statement: *"The sin of those who forsake Christ and the Gospel after their convictions of its truth and profession of it, is, on many account, far greater than that of those who crucified Him in the days of His flesh."* Now, let me explain what he's saying there, in case you didn't get that. For someone to make a profession of faith and then turn around and deny the truths in the Word of God — in other words, they're crucifying the Son of God afresh; we're going to see that in Hebrews — this writer is saying that they're worse than those who actually carried Christ out physically and crucified Him, hung Him on a cross. He said the apostates are worse.

Let’s back up into 1 Timothy, chapter 3, beginning at verse 14, and this will help us to get the context for 1 Timothy, chapter 4. Paul says in 1 Timothy, chapter 3, verses 14 to 16, “These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: ¹⁵But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness . . .” Now, there are six articles here that describe the mystery of godliness. He's talking about Christ from His birth to His glorification. He's talking about the divine redemptive plan that God has for you and me, and it's all wrapped up in Jesus Christ — who He was and what He accomplished. And he says here's the mystery of godliness: “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” So he goes from Christ's birth to His glorification, and he tells us who Christ was. He was God manifest in the flesh, and it tells us what He accomplished; in other words, it tells us His life, His ministry from His birth until now sitting at the right hand of the Father.

Then he steps into chapter 4, and he says this: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ²Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” Notice how the chapter begins. Paul says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly.” The Spirit of God is speaking to the church through the gift of prophecy that the apostle Paul has, and he says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in” — Notice — “the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” Now, again, I'm not going to jump into the context here. I just want to read these and say, Look here. Here's where we find the verses talking about the last times, the times in which we live, and talking about the apostasy that would be prevalent in the last days, and Paul says they will be “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.” We’re talking about the development of apostasy throughout the church age.

Now, turn with me, please, to 2 Peter, chapter 3. Again, apostasy is not backsliding because we're going to see there's no forgiveness for apostasy. There is for backsliding — is there not? — if there's repentance? Did not Peter deny the Lord three times one night? And what happened? Well, he gives us a couple of letters. We're fixing to read from his letters. So was he forgiven? Yes. So we're not talking about backsliding. We're not talking about stumbling and falling or making a mistake. We're talking about someone who once professed to believe the truth and turns his back upon that truth. In 2 Peter, chapter 3, Peter begins in verse 1 by saying this: *“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: ²That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: ³Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.”* Now, I only read that because of the phrase “last days,” and he mentions scoffers, those who mock at the Word of God. Notice in 1 John, chapter 2, verses 18 and 19. This passage, without any doubt, is dealing with apostasy. John just got through talking about the world, and now in verse 18 he said, *“Little children, it is the last time”* — Now, notice that. There's that phrase again, “latter days,” “last days,” “last time.” He said, *“it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.”* Everybody is looking for this one Antichrist. John said there are many antichrists. What is antichrist? Those who deny the truths of God. There were many antichrists in the days of the apostle Paul and Peter and Jesus, and there are many antichrists in the time in which you and I live today.

Now, look at verse 19 carefully: *“They went out from us. . .”* Notice that. That means they were with them at one time. Judas was among the twelve. Balaam, by the way, may be thrown into this category as well, because he professed to know something about God, and we know his story. John said, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us”* — Notice the “us”; we're going to see that in Hebrews as well — *“for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”* Now, when we come to the subject of apostasy, there is a possibility of somebody making that profession of faith and being numbered with the people but being apostate in their heart, and then it manifests itself later; it becomes public later. Let me ask you this: When the disciples walked with the Lord Jesus Christ for three, three and a half years, Judas was among them. Did they know he was an apostate? Did they know that he was in apostasy? Absolutely not. They let him be the treasurer, did they not? Even sitting at the table where the Lord said that one of you is going to deny me, they did not know at that moment that Judas was an apostate. He says in the latter part of verse 19 that they would no doubt have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not of us. Verse 20 says, *“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things,”* and verse 21 says that they know the truth.

I was going to go to chapter 4, but I'm not going to do that. Let's go on to Hebrews and consider something here. Go to Hebrews, chapter 6. I'll stir up some questions in your mind by reading these verses. But notice in Hebrews, chapter 6. What is apostasy? In the book of Hebrews, if a person was a Jew, it would be like somebody going back into Judaism, or if the person was a Gentile, it would be like somebody going back into heathenism, somebody going back into sin, somebody believing something or

saying they believe something and then denying that later on. We're going to see this right here. It definitely fits into the category of presumptuous sins as in Numbers, chapter 15.

Now, I want you to see as we read this that in backsliding, there's always forgiveness with repentance, but with apostasy there appears to be no forgiveness. Now, let me just read a few verses. You can chew on them this week, and you can consider them, meditate upon them. But let me just cut into the text. Let me lay a foundation, first of all. The book of Hebrews deals with apostasy. The book of Hebrews gives warning to its readers. The book of Hebrews uses Israel of old, the Exodus generation. Now, before I read, I want you to keep in mind that the book of Hebrews in chapter 3 and chapter 4 and other places uses the Exodus generation as an example to bring warning to those in the first century who would be reading the book of Hebrews, and especially those that came out of Judaism and accepted Christ as their Savior under the New Covenant. Now, he's going to use some words here like "tasted" and "have been enlightened" and "partakers" and so forth, and it's just like in Israel of the Old Testament. Now, think about this. The Exodus generation came out, came through the Red Sea; they tasted of the goodness of God; they saw the grace of God; they saw the glory of God; they saw the power of God; they saw the redemptive grace of God in the Old Testament; in other words, they saw the miracles and the provisions and all that God had done for them, and still many of them did not enter into God's rest. He brings this over and says, "Look here. Watch out for apostasy."

Now, notice as we read verses 4, 5, and 6 in Hebrews, chapter 6: *"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, ⁵And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, ⁶If they shall fall away" — We're not talking about a little backsliding; we're talking about apostasy — "If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame."* Pretty serious warning, isn't it? A lot of people take this verse and they want to play around with it and use this verse for getting in and out and getting in and out and things like that. He's saying that, once this is committed, it's impossible to renew them. This is talking about apostasy, those that came out of Judaism and now under the New Covenant that say they've been enlightened, they believe in the Messiah, and then totally turn their back on that and those that come out of heathenism as the Gentiles and worshipping idols and say now they believe, and then totally turn back to those idols. That's what this is talking about. This is not talking about stumbling or making a mistake. It's talking about apostasy — a very severe warning.

Then in verses 7, 8, 9, 10, and throughout the rest of the chapter, he brings hope and comfort to the believers who persevere, and he makes a comparison between the fruitful land and the briars and so forth. Now, again, I'm using this as an example, and I want you to see that this passage is dealing with a total defection, a permanent turning away from Christ and His Word and His Truth. It's a mockery, and he said in verse 6 that when somebody does this, he says *"seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame"* — no different than those who crucified Him in AD 33. And then the warning is given in chapter 3. If you read through Hebrews, chapter 3, the warning is given. In verse 12 he said, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."* Then in chapter 4, verse 11, he said, *"Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."*

I want you to turn with me to Hebrews, chapter 10. Some of you may do your little devotions out of Proverbs every morning, and that's good, but these are verses I have to deal with on a daily basis, and there's some very serious stuff here. God takes His Word far more seriously than we do. And without mentioning names, we were just talking about somebody accusing us of being legalists, and they claim to be of the Reformed faith — and we're legalists. And I said, "Well, they need to go back and look at what some of the Reformers actually said about some of the doctrines in the Bible." Now, notice verse 23. I'm going to just read through this and make just brief comments and give you something to look at. He said in verse 23, "Let us hold fast . . ." You find this over and over and over in the Scripture. "Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;)"²⁴ And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:²⁵ Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*;" — There's that word "forsake" — "as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Now, notice the next few verses that line up very closely with Hebrews, chapter 6. He said in verse 26, "For" — in other words, if we do this — "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth," — In other words, after we've been enlightened, after we've been shown the Word of God, after we've seen the truths of the New Covenant — he says, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." If someone is an apostate and they deny the truths of the Word of God and deny Christ, there is no way to be saved. There's no sacrifice. There's no other sacrifice that can be made, because Christ is the Lamb of God; He is the ultimate sacrifice.

So they're walking away from the very One who can save them. It says in verse 27, "But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."²⁸ He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:²⁹ Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God" — Now, look at this. I want to emphasize this. It said in Hebrews that they crucified the Son of God afresh. Here it says, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified" — Notice — "an unholy thing, and hath done despite" — that is, insult — "unto the Spirit of grace?" He said in verse 31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." In verse 29 he says that they've trodden under foot the Son of God and counted His blood as an unholy thing. In Hebrews 6 he said they've crucified afresh the Son of God. In other words, this is dealing with apostasy. This is dealing with somebody denying the very truths that they said they believed and held dear to, and if you will think in your mind, if you've been saved very long at all, you know people who fit into this category. I've known many over the years that fit into this category of being an apostate.

Something comes to my mind — and you've heard me preach on this before — and it is what many call "the unpardonable sin." Now, it depends on who you talk to as to what that is. Somebody may say it's getting drunk. Another may say, well, it's committing adultery. Another may say, well, it's lying or cheating or a number of things. But in the context, the unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Spirit of God, the testimony of the Spirit of God. You know, I've had people call me and say, "Well, I'm afraid I can't be saved. I've spoken against God; I've spoken against His Son, and I've even spoken against the Holy Spirit." Well, I would imagine all of us have spoken against the Son before we got saved. All of us have said things we shouldn't say, but what he's talking about in the context of Matthew, chapter 12, verses 30 and 31, and in the context of Mark, chapter 3, and Luke, chapter 12, where three times we have

this sin there, in the context there, he's dealing with Pharisees and scribes and he's dealing with apostasy. He's not talking about somebody who has made a mistake before he got saved or somebody who has done something wrong. He's talking about those who speak out against Jesus Christ and the revelation that the Spirit of God has given about Him, those who crucify Him afresh, those who trod under foot the blood of the New Covenant whereby they are to be saved. He's talking about apostasy.

I had a man call me yesterday. This man lives in this state but a long ways away from here, and he said, "I am just now starting to understand." He said, "You don't know what I was like before I got saved," and he said, "After I accepted the Lord, this thing in Matthew and this thing in Hebrews," he said, "have I blasphemed the Holy Spirit?" And he said, "I'm just now getting some peace over this subject after many years, because I thought I had failed in that area." And I said, "Good timing to call me because of what I'm going to preach on tomorrow," and we started going through reading these verses. I said, "This is not talking about some little mistake or something you did." I said, "This is talking about somebody who out and out denies who Jesus Christ is, denies what He came here to accomplish on Calvary's cross. I said, "That is apostasy."

I want you to notice in Acts, chapter 20, that he said these things would rise up in the church. By the way, let me say this: In Hebrews 6:4, the consequence of apostasy is what? No forgiveness. Now, you ask, "How does all that work out?" I'm not going to try to work it out. I'll let God take care of that. But he said it's impossible to renew them again if they crucify afresh the Son of God — those who have been enlightened, those who have tasted, those who have been made partakers, those who have made a profession that they know the Lord and they believe the salvation that's under the New Covenant. If they turn their back and they slander God and His Word and the Lord Jesus Christ, he said it is impossible to renew them again unto salvation.

Notice in Acts, chapter 20, verse 27. The only reason I'm turning here to read this is because of what Paul said about the church, because we've not gotten to our last point yet. He said here in verse 27, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. ²⁸Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Now, here's what I'm after. In verse 29 he said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." He said there will be those who will try to come into the church, and he said there will be those who will rise up in the church. Judas was among the disciples, and he was an apostate.

Turn with me, please, to Jude, the small book of Jude. You see, what I'm trying to get at is that there are those who may walk among us, may have the right words, may even testify, and yet they can be an apostate. Now, I believe the book of Jude is the only book in the Bible where the entire book is a warning against apostasy — I mean, the entire book from beginning to end. It shows apostasy from the beginning in the Garden of Eden all the way to the end, the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jude begins in verse 5 dealing with disbelief and verse 6, disloyalty; verse 7, degeneration; verse 8, defilers; verse 9, defamers; and verses 10 and 11, the Devil himself. It's dealing with apostasy. Notice with me carefully as

we read verse 3 and verse 4. We've talked about the definition, the development, and now the defense against apostasy. What are you and I to do? Now, we see apostasy defined for us in the Bible — a very serious sin, a lot of warning against it, and it can get into the church. I believe it's in the churches across our land in America today. So what about the defense against it? Well, here's what we're told. Jude says in verses 3 and 4, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend”—that is, fight — “for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The Devil wants to rob you and me as individuals. He's robbed our nation of any truths and principles, and he wants to rob the churches across our land of any truth, so Jude is saying here that we are to contend. That word means to fight, to make warfare. That word means to agonize, to strive, to stand, no compromise, no traditions of men.

Now, look at this. Here's the reason that we must contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints, and that's very easy to find, by the way. Acts 2:42 talks about the apostles' doctrine. There's that faith. Acts, chapter 6, verse 7, talks about being obedient to that faith, the faith. When Jude says "contending for the faith," this is more than just simple faith. When he says "the faith," he's talking about the body of truth revealed in the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ and by the apostles. When he says "the faith," he's talking about that body of truth that you and I hold dear. He says to contend for it. Jude said in verse 4, “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So we're told to contend for the faith. The phrase "the faith" is used in a sense of a creed or an orthodox belief. We're to fight for the faith. We're to contend for it. The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, in verse 15 to rightly divide the word of truth, divide truth from error. Turn with me to 2 Timothy. Many of you can quote the passage here in 2 Timothy, chapter 3. I told you we'd come back to this. Now, we've already read the first part of 2 Timothy 3. We've already read in 2 Timothy, chapter 4. Now we want to come to 2 Timothy, chapter 3, and let's read from verses 14 through 17, and we're going to close with this passage. We're talking about the defense against apostasy. We're talking about restoration, reformation. We're talking about no compromise. We're talking about fighting and standing for the truth in our lives and in the church, this local church, not to allow apostasy to be in it. The Bible says in Proverbs 23:23, “Buy the truth, and sell it not.” I want you to think about this. John the Baptist had a restoration ministry, did he not? You read about that in Luke 1, verses 16 and 17. He came to restore some things. He came to pave the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Nehemiah had a restoration ministry. You see, we are to stand for the truths of God and not allow apostasy in our lives or allow it into our church. We're to rightly divide the word of truth. Paul said in verse 12 of this chapter, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,” and he said in verse 13, “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.” So without any doubt, if Paul wrote this in the first century, he said it's just going to get worse. He said there's going to be apostasy, and it's going to get worse and worse as time goes on.

So we're in the latter times of the latter times, the last days of the last days. And Paul said in verses 14 through 17, “But continue ...” We're talking about the defense. He said, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

¹⁵And that 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. ¹⁶All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The defense against apostasy is that we stand and contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints. We find this in the Word of God. It's called the apostles' doctrine. Christ gave it to the apostles; they gave it to you and me, and they wrote it down for you and me. This Book gives us the truths of God's Word.

Now, I don't enjoy preaching on this subject. I don't even enjoy thinking about it, but it is a fact. I've only given you a few passages, but there are a lot of warnings in the Word of God dealing with this subject, so there is such a thing as apostasy. There are such things as apostates in our time that are among God's people. They always have been among God's people and they always will be, and we are to look out for that, and we've got much warning in the Scriptures.

Let's kneel together this morning before we sing, and let's go to the Lord in closing prayer. Would you come, and let's kneel together here this morning and seek the Lord.
