

LEADING THE CHURCH INTO APOSTASY

Rev.2:5; 3:1

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By “apostasy” we mean “a defection;” “abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed to believe;” “total desertion of principles of faith,” i.e., the faith of Jesus Christ.
 - a. To “apostatize” is “to commit apostasy
 - b. An “apostate” is “one who has forsaken the faith of Christ.”
2. By “church” we have reference to the word as used in the N.T. in its “local” sense; that is, the “called out,” or the saved, the saints, baptized believers, making up the church in a certain locality or place, voluntarily bound together under God’s direction for work and worship; such as: a certain city, as opposed to the word “church” as used in the “universal” sense; i.e., to refer to all who have believed and obeyed the gospel the world over, known as “the church;” “the one body of Christ;” “the whole body of the saved by the blood of Christ.”
 - a. Note Rom.16:16 (plural), or singular, as in Ac.20:17,28; 1Cor.1:2; Gal.1:2; Rev.1:11 – local sense.
 - b. Cf. Mt.16:18, universal sense; also, 1Cor.12:28.
3. It is possible for saints, individual members of local churches, to apostatize, Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-31; 2Pet.2:20-22; Eph.4:17-19; 1Tim.4:1,2.
4. Likewise, it is possible for a local church, the whole body of saints making up the local church, to be led into apostasy, Rev.2:1-5; 3:1-4; 3:15-19.
5. Since the local church can be weakened to point of destruction, even spiritual death, as was Sardis, or led into apostasy, I raise the question: How can that be done? What are the ways by which it can be done?
6. The purpose of this lesson is to note some of the ways the local church can be led into apostasy.

II. DISCUSSION

A. BY DISREGARDING THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST AND ADOPTING AS A STANDARD THE WISHES AND DESIRES OF THE PEOPLE CONTRARY TO THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST.

1. There are only two sources of authority in religion, only one of which is of God from heaven, thus acceptable.
 - a. In Mt.21:23-27 this is clearly illustrated by Jesus in the case of the baptism of John, the Baptist, when the unbelieving Jews challenged Jesus' authority as he taught in the temple.
2. The ways of man taught by human authority only seem to be right; right only in their own eyes, Prov.14:12; 21:2.
3. The Lord through:
 - a. Isaiah said: 55:6-9.
 - b. Jeremiah said: 10:23.
4. "All authority in heaven and earth" has been given to Jesus Christ, and only to him, Mt.28:18; 17:5; Heb.1:1,2; Eph.1:22; 1Pet.3:22.
5. Failing to heed what is taught in the following verses leads to apostasy:
 - a. Col.3:17.
 - b. 2Jno.9,10.
6. Consider the warning of 1Tim.4:1,2; 2Tim.3:16-4:5; Col.2:8-10,20-23; Mt.15:9; 1Jno.4:1.

B. CEASING TO PREACH AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINES AND FALSE RELIGIONS LEADS TO APOSTASY.

1. It only takes a short time for it to happen.
 - a. Consider what happened to God's people Israel in one generation according to Judg.2:6-15.
 - b. Consider also the churches of Galatia as per Gal.1:6-9; 3:1; 5:4,7,8.
2. Consider also the following passages and be forewarned, Ac.20:28-31; Rom.16:17,18; 2Th.2:7; Cf. Eph.5:11; Tit.1:9-11; Rev.2:1,2; 2:18-20.

C. MANIFESTING AND PRACTICING A PARTY SPIRIT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH CAN LEAD TO APOSTASY – IT IS ONE OF THE STAGES OF APOSTASY.

1. The example of the church at Corinth is proof positive, 1Cor.1:10-13; 3:1-4; 5:1,2; 6:1; 11:17,20,30; 15:12. Cf. 2Cor.13:10.
2. Jas.2:1-10 condemns the sin of being a respecter of persons, which is a form of the party spirit, and which also destroys unity and fellowship in the local church. Cf. Psa.133:1; Gal.5:15; 1Pet.3:8,9.

D. TOLERATING SIN IN THE LIVES OF MEMBERS OF THE LOCAL CHURCH, TAKING NO ACTION AGAINST THE UNGODLY AND THE WORLDLY, IS ANOTHER INDICATION OF APOSTASY AT WORK IN THE CHURCH.

1. The N.T. Scriptures demand action in this realm.
 - a. 1Th.5:14 exhorts: "...warn them that are unruly..."
 - b. In 1Cor.5:1-13 the Apostle Paul:
 - (1) Condemned the Corinthian church for their attitude toward and their inaction regarding sin in the church, Vv.1,2.
 - (2) Said, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," V.6.
 - (a) The sin of the one adversely affects the whole!
 - (b) Ignore it to your own condemnation and destruction! Cf. Rev.2:1-5.
 - (c) Paul, in 2Cor.2:6-11, proves to us that proper discipline of erring brethren does indeed accomplish the desired end.
 - (3) Demanded that they withdraw fellowship from, or "deliver" the guilty party "unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus," Vv.3-5,7,9-13.
 - (a) At least two purposes for withdrawal and discipline of the sinful member.
 - (1) To preserve the purity of the church.

- (2) To save the soul of the sinning member.
- c. Again, in 2Th.3:6-15, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul said:
 - (1) “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received from us,” V.6
 - (a) The brother walking disorderly is:
 - (1) “Out of ranks”
 - (2) “Deviating from the prescribed order or rule” of conduct. (Thayer, 83.
 - (2) “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be shamed,” V.14.
 - (a) “Note” – Strong, 4593 – “to distinguish, i.e., mark (for avoidance).” “to take cautionary note of one who refuses obedience to the Apostle’s word by the Epistle,” Vine,III,116
 - (b) “have no company with him” – Strong, 4874, -- do not “mix up together, i.e. (fig.) associate with”
 - (c) “that he may be ashamed” “to put to shame...to be ashamed, lit. means to turn in...that is, to turn one upon himself and so produce a feeling of shame, a wholesome shame which involves a change of conduct,” Vine, I, 77.
- d. Also, in Tit.3:10,11, Paul said.
 - (1) “Heresy” –“denotes (a) a choosing, choice; than that which is chosen, and hence, an opinion, esp. a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects, Gal.5:20 (marg. ‘parties’)...see 2Pet.2:1, where ‘destructive’ (RV) signifies leading to ruin,” Vine,II,217. (A human choice contrary to the will of God.)

- (2) “Heretical”—pertaining to heresy; “primarily denotes capable of choosing; hence, causing division by a party spirit, factious,” Vine, II, 217.
 - (3) “Heretick” –One who holds or maintains heretical opinions, causing division.
 - (4) “Admonish”—Strong, 3559 – “calling attention to, i.e., (by imp.) mild rebuke or warning.” Vine, I,30, lit. a putting in mind...in Tit.3:10, of that which is to be administered for the correction of one who creates trouble in the church.”
 - (5) “Reject” – Strong, 3868 – “avoid, refuse (i.e. refuse fellowship with).” Thayer, “to shun, avoid”. See Heb.12:25.
- e. Moreover, in 1Tim.5:20, Paul said: “Them that sin rebuke before all that others also may fear.
2. This has been said by some to be “the forgotten commandment.”

D. PREACHING A MAN-PLEASING GOSPEL IS A QUICK, SURE-FIRE WAY TO DESTROY THE FAITH OF CHRIST AND LEAD THE LOCAL CHURCH INTO APOSTASY.

1. See Gal.1:6-12 (emp.V.10),23; 5:4.
2. Ac.20:28-32.
3. Ac.4:17-20; 5:25-33,41.
4. 2Tim.4:1-5.
5. To the elders of the church Tit.1:9-11 says –
6. Gal.2:11-21;Cf. Rom.12:9.
7. Preaching and practicing a man-pleasing gospel is simply endeavoring to be like the religious world about us, trying to keep up with, ape or mimic the sectarians, which is evidence of the existence of apostasy in the local church.
 - a. This is the very spirit of sinful Israel of old in saying to God via Samuel the prophet, “Give us a king like the nations,” 1Sam.8.
 - (1) Why did they do this?
 - (2) Because they were dissatisfied with God’s rule over them!

- b. Never lose sight of what God through Moses said to Israel in Exo.23:2: “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.”
- c. Not what Jesus said in Mt.15:9.
- d. Nor what Paul wrote in Col.2:8-10,20-23.

F. ENDEAVORING TO MAKE A SOCIAL INSTITUTION OUT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH BY HAVING IT ENGAGED IN AND SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL WORK OF RECREATION AND ENTERTAINMENT, WHETHER OF THE YOUNG OR OLD, IS EVIDENCE THAT APOSTASY IS ALREADY APPARENT.

1. The N.T. Scriptures reveal the divinely ordained work of the local church to be:
 - a. Evangelism, Mt.28:18-20; Mk.16:15,16; 2Tim.4:1-5.
 - b. Edification, Ac.20:28-32; 1Cor.14:5,12,26; Eph.4:8-16; 1Th.5:11.
 - c. Benevolence administered to needy saints, Ac.2:44,45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom.15:25-31; 1Cor.16:1-3; 2Cor.8:1-4; 9:1,12-14; Cf. 1Tim.5:16.
 - d. Provision for the public assemblies of the local church for work and worship in spirit and in truth; such as: place, supplies, etc.
2. The church is a spiritual institution, the spiritual body of Christ, to be engaged in spiritual work and worship, not secular endeavors, Rom.14:17; 1Cor.11:20-22; Cf. 1Tim.3:15; Eph.2:19-22.

G. WHEN THE CHURCH SHIFTS THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS GOD-ORDAINED WORK OF EVANGELISM AND BENEVOLENCE BY WORKING THROUGH AND BY MEANS OF SEPARATE HUMAN ORGANIZATIONS IT IS IN APOSTASY.

1. This is true whether or not it be:
 - a. A human Missionary Society for evangelism
 - b. A human Benevolent Society (known as an Orphan Home, such as Morrilton Orphan Home, or a Widow’s Home, etc.) for its benevolent work

- c. Or a Sponsoring Church arrangement, for Congregational Cooperation.
2. All such is without Scriptural authority and therefore sinful.
3. This doesn't mean Congregational Cooperation is sinful, for it was authorized and practiced by N.T. churches in apostolic times, Ac.11:27-30; 1Cor.16:1,2; 2Cor.11:8,9.
4. But it does mean that *unscriptural congregational cooperation* is sinful on the same principle that mechanical instrumental music in worship of God is sinful.
 - a. Centralized congregational cooperation is unauthorized.
 - b. This is the type of congregational cooperation involved in the Sponsoring church arrangement for congregational cooperation – therefore unauthorized and sinful!

III. CONCLUSION

1. We have shown from the N.T.:
 - a. That apostasy of both the individual saint and the local church as a body can apostatize.
 - b. Some of the ways in which the local church can be led into apostasy.
 - c. Some of the ways wherein it is evident that apostasy is at work in the local church, or that apostasy therein is already a fact.
2. This has been preached to serve as a reminder for one and all of the ever-present danger of it happening, as well as how easily and quickly it can happen!
3. Also, to remind us of our duty to always be on guard lest we allow it to happen locally due to our own neglect!