
Heresy and Apostasy

The words "heresy" and "apostasy" are two of the most often used words to refer to doctrinal error and practice in the Church Age.

Any Christian is subject to error in his thinking about spiritual matters. The presence of the sin nature in the soul guarantees that we will have a constant battle to distinguish between human and divine viewpoints. Error may be the result of ignorance, of a lack of doctrine, or of deliberately adopting some point of view or activity.

The open-minded Christian who is positive to the teaching of the Bible and who is willing for the Lord to deal with him in doctrinal matters will find that his erroneous ideas will be replaced with the truth of the Word of God. As he grows in Christ, he will avoid heresy and any deliberate apostasy.

Heresy itself, which is the result of making a wrong choice among competing ideas, may have been entered into as a result of being deceived (EPH. 4:11-18) or of falling into a snare of Satan. Heresy becomes apostasy, however, whenever a person deliberately decides to reject Bible truth and maintain and promote false ideas. This paper is written to help believers avoid error, heresy, or apostasy.

HERESY

The word "heresy" comes from the Greek αἵρεσις (**haireisis**) meaning, "a choice; a taking for oneself; a sect or school of philosophy". Hence, in the Bible, it means (1) a chosen course of thought or action; (2) dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims; or (3) doctrinal departures from revealed truth, or erroneous doctrinal views.

The apostles warned the church continuously against such non-Biblical views. Note particularly the stern directions to Titus regarding the correction of problems caused in Crete by Judaistic heresies.

In the Apostolic Age we find three fundamental forms of heresy. These have appeared in one form or another in every generation since.

JUDAISM

Judaism is the false counterpart of Jewish Christianity which insists on combining Jewish practice with Christianity. This tends to cause Christianity to sink to the level of Judaism in that it makes the Gospel merely the perfection which they suppose can be obtained by keeping the Law. Judaism regards Christ as a mere prophet, a second Moses; it denies His divine nature, His priestly function, and His kingly offices.

Judaism holds that circumcision, sacrifice, etc. are to be binding on Christians and necessary for salvation. There is no conception of Christianity as a new, free, and universal religion. Judaism appears in the 2nd Century A.D. in a more fully developed version under the name of Ebionism.

GNOSTICISM

Gnosticism spread through the whole church during the first two or three centuries after Christ. This heresy was an opposite reaction to Judaism. It separated Christianity completely from Jewish influence with the result that it tried to eliminate any connection to the true historical foundations of Christianity. Gnosticism denies the humanity of Christ, and it adulterates Christianity with pagan ideas and practices.

SYNCRETISM

Syncretism combines Judaism, and then Christianity, with heathen philosophies, especially those of Pythagoras and Plato, so that, under the Christian name, there appeared confused combinations of these opposing systems, forming either a paganized Judaism or a Christianized paganism, depending on which element prevailed.

Whatever the differences in the heresies, all amount to a distinct denial of the Gospel, the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. They make Christ either a mere man or a mere superhuman phantom; they allow no real and lasting union of the Divine and human natures in the person of the Redeemer. Heresy disturbed the unity of doctrine and of fellowship in the early church, which was therefore forced to exclude those holding false doctrine from its communion (TITUS 3:10). Once excluded, however, heretics formed societies of their own.

Heresy becomes apostasy when there is a deliberate holding to error in spite of knowing the truth of the Word of God. A heretic becomes apostate at the point when he hears the truth and decides against it.

APOSTASY

Apostasy is the deliberate act of a professing Christian who knowingly and deliberately rejects revealed truth regarding the deity of Jesus Christ, redemption through His atoning sacrifice, or any part of the doctrines related to Salvation. The apostate is in revolt against God. He maintains an outward profession of faith and a facade of true spirituality; but he departs from the faith. Apostasy, then, is insidious, subtle, and quite devastating.

Some of the characteristics, or synonyms, of apostasy are mentioned in the Bible, including: seducing spirits, doctrines of demons, hypocritical lying, a seared conscience, forbidding of marriage and meats, and a form of godliness without the power thereof. The rest of this paper contains a number of points about apostasy along with an extensive listing of Bible references for further study of the subject.

1. Satan is the author of apostasy, JOHN 8:44, "Ye are of your father, the devil..." and 2 COR. 4:4, "In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them."

2. Demons help to carry out apostasy in the world, 1 TIM. 4:1.

3. Examples of apostasy in the human race mentioned in Jude are:

Cain - who rejected the Word of God and went religious.

Balaam - who accepted a bribe to curse Israel and fell victim to slavery to the details of life.

Korah - who led a revolt against authority, was anti-establishment.

4. Religious apostasy has many facets:

False gospels: GAL. 1:6-12; 2 COR. 11:3,4

False doctrines: 1 TIM. 4:1,2; 2 PET. 2:1; 1 JOHN 4:3

False messiahs: JOHN 5:43; MATT. 24:5

False prophets, teachers, and evangelists: 2 PET. 2:1; 1 JOHN 4:1; 2 COR. 11:13-15

False ritual: 1 COR. 10:20,21; ROM. 11:9; ISA. 1:10-14

False Gods: 1 COR. 8:5; 10:19-21

False righteousness: Phil. 3:9; Matt. 5:20

5. Characteristics of apostate doctrines:

They repudiate the Person and work of Christ, 2 PET. 2:1; 1 JOHN 2:22,23; 2 JOHN 9,10

They repudiate the veracity of the Word of God, 2 PET. 3:3,4

They ignore the judgments of God, 2 PET. 3:5,6

6. Apostasy appeals to the trends of the sin nature; the trend toward asceticism, 1 TIM. 4:1-3, and the trend toward licentiousness, 2 PET. 2

7. Apostasy is judged by God:

Angels were judged for their apostasy, 2 PET. 2:4; JUDE 6.

Civilizations are judged for apostasy, 2 PET. 2:5.

Cities and national entities are judged for apostasy, 2 PET. 2:6; JUDE 7; JER. 23.

8. Apostates are described in the Bible as:

Animals of instinct, minus doctrine and minus morality, operating on emotional impulses and licentious desires, 2 PET. 2:12.

Fruitless trees that are twice dead; they are spiritually dead, and they will go to the Lake of Fire, JUDE 12.

Waterless clouds, unstable, driven by the wind, 2 PET. 2:17; JUDE 12.

Vicious waves of the sea, dangerous and to be avoided, JUDE 13.

Wandering stars, living in delusion and error, JUDE 13.

9. Apostasy is prevalent in the last days of each dispensation:

Age of the Gentiles, GEN. 11:1-9.

Age of Israel, REV. 13; 2 THESS. 2

Church Age, 2 PET. 3:3; 2 TIM. 3:1.

11. Apostasy is prevalent in the last days of a national entity, JER. 23:9-40.

12. There will be no apostasy during the Millennial Kingdom, REV. 20:1-3; COL. 2:15; ZECH. 13:2,3; ISA. 2:1-4; ISA. 11:9.

13. A brief period of apostasy will follow the Millennial reign of Christ, REV. 20:7-11.
