

4 Reasons Christians Quit Following God

Over the last few years, I have grieved deep within as I have watched believers around me get knocked off by the enemy through their negligence, lack of self-control and wrong choices. Though Satan is the author of every evil thing that happens, we can't continue to blame him for everything.

Weekly, I am meeting with ministers' wives and ministry families who haven't heeded the warnings of the Holy Spirit. Because they have neglected to cut off wrong influences or relationships, they have been needlessly sucked into a web of deception, sending their lives into a downward spiral.

In one such case, a pastor's wife related a story to me about how her husband had become attracted to a member of his advisory board. The other woman, a "prophetess," was part of an inner circle that, along with the pastor, ran the church. These were considered the more spiritual church members.

The pastor's wife, a stay-at-home mother, had become less aggressive in her pursuit of God. She wasn't reading her Bible or praying regularly.

As a result, her husband felt she wasn't able to hear God, and he wouldn't listen to any of her counsel. He was deceived.

It is obvious from reports we read and even our own experiences that the Holy Spirit is currently being poured out upon the earth in every nation. We are living in a season when multitudes are being saved worldwide.

Yet many believe this season is what 2 Timothy 3:1 describes as the "perilous times" of the last days—times in which spiritual deception will flourish (NKJV). Several passages in the New Testament warn us about a deception so widespread it

causes even those who appear to be firmly established in the faith to be led away from the truth.

THE COURSE OF DECEPTION

One night in January 1990, the Lord awakened me from my sleep. Within my spirit I heard His voice.

He said, "You've wondered how the elect could ever be deceived. You've wondered how people who are members of strong appear to be stable Christians could ever be deceived in the last days.

"You will see some Christians who appear to be established and faithful church attenders fall away from Me," He continued. "Some will be restored by recognizing their sin and repenting. Others will become hardened, rejecting repentance. Their lives will be destroyed, but worst of all, they'll go to hell."

God showed me that the roots of deception are pride and self-centeredness (see Obad. 3). These were the reasons for Satan's fall from heaven (see Is. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17).

Pride cannot see its own weakness or wrongdoing. Self-centeredness sees only its own desire.

God "resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). The humble are those who know how dependent they are on God.

Once pride and self-sufficiency take root, we often open the door to further deception in these four ways:

1. Neglecting time in God's Word. When we pursue God's Word as our daily wisdom, God will be able to work His will in our lives. Everything in our lives will be judged by, and brought in line with, His Word.

His Word exposes the flesh and demands that it straighten up. It also helps us discern between our souls—mind, will and

emotions—and our spirits—the inner man where God speaks to us (see Heb. 4:12).

The Word of God helps us discern whether our motives are right or selfish. It convicts us when we are wrong and teaches us how to live right.

Jesus told His followers that in order to be His true disciples, they must continue in His Word. Then they would know the truth, and the truth would make them free (see John 8:31-32). To continue in God's Word means not only to read it and hear it preached, but also to make a daily decision to live by it in every aspect of life, allowing it to adjust our lives accordingly (see James 1:22-25).

2. Having no daily prayer life. Prayer is not only what we do during a daily devotional time or right before meals. It is open, two-way communication all day and night in which God and His creatures speak and listen to one another.

First Peter 4:7 warns, "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." In other words, never quit praying!

The Bible says Daniel was in a habit of praying three times daily (see Dan. 6:10). For years he and his people were held captive in another kingdom, yet he kept his prayer relationship with God, and he was mighty in his influence.

The king considered Daniel to be wise. He had an excellent spirit, and people could not find anything in his life for which they could accuse him other than his devotion to God (see Dan. 6:4-5).

Chapter 10 recounts an incident in which Daniel prayed uninterrupted for 21 days. Afterward an angel appeared to him, telling him that he was sent the first day Daniel prayed and that he had fought the prince of Persia the whole time.

Because of Daniel's persistence in prayer, the angel was joined by Michael the archangel. Together they overcame the demonic prince and delivered Daniel's answer (see Dan. 10:1-13).

In prayer, God will speak into our hearts with thoughts or warnings. But prayerlessness will result in creating an opportunity for temptation or weakness (see Matt. 26:41).

Neglecting prayer also will lead to spiritual dullness, which hinders our ability to make good decisions. If we are going to make it in life, we'll need to talk with our Creator and Savior throughout every day.

3. Failing to be rightly related to God and others. God told me that there are many Christians who attend church now who will fall away because they will not become rightly related to God or the body of Christ. Eventually, some will either stop going to church or frequently change churches and never become rooted in a local church.

Right-relatedness toward God means yielding ourselves to Him and placing ourselves under His authority. It's submitting to His Word—the entire counsel of God's Word, not just the parts we like.

More than just fellowship, which can be simply a gathering of people with a common interest, being rightly related to the body of Christ requires submission to one another in the fear of the Lord (see Eph. 5:21). It also necessitates our submitting to local church leadership (see Heb. 13:17).

Every person needs to humble himself and allow the input of others in his life. No one has all the answers, and no one is so self-sufficient that he doesn't need other people around in order to grow in the Lord.

Submission requires humility. God won't humble us; we must humble ourselves. Then we will submit to God's direction,

thoughts, corrections and flow of His Spirit (see James 4:6-7).

When you are in submission to God, you can resist the devil's temptations and testings and overcome them as Jesus did (see Matt. 4:1-11).

Another area of right-relatedness involves the home. In Ephesians 5:22-33 Paul says that wives are to submit to their own husbands "as to the Lord" ("as to the Lord" releases you from submitting to anything that is immoral, abusive or against God's principles).

A godly wife will want to love and respect her husband and be a help to him. A husband who truly loves his wife as Christ loves the church will continually lay down his life for his wife. His desires and opinions will become flexible so that he can do what is best for his wife and children.

Ultimately, to be rightly related to God is to walk in His peace and His unconditional love, which serve as the foundation for all our relationships. The God kind of love—agape—will knit people of all denominations and cultures together.

It is a love in spite of, not because of. And it will forge the kind of devotion to one another that God is seeking, compelling us to reach out beyond ourselves to bless and benefit others.

in without giving out. I've noticed that when people sit week after week, taking in messages but never giving out, they become spiritually dull, critical and quick to judge others. Typically, they begin acting as though they have enough knowledge and can coast on what they know until they die.

Giving out is more than witnessing or giving our money to God's work. It also entails laying down our lives before Jesus in order to share with others what we have received.

If the body of Christ had only self-centered members who had no sense of responsibility for the people around them, Christianity would never spread to the world but would ultimately die.

Jesus said, “‘Freely you have received, freely give’” (Matt. 10:8). By God’s grace we have received the gifts of salvation, forgiveness, freedom, healing, restoration and more. It must now be our mission as believers to give out to others the truths we have received so they can escape hell, make heaven and experience all Jesus wants to do in their lives. This is the time to hear the loving voice of God and not shove it aside.

There is an alarm that is sounding to those who will listen. Time is too short to live haphazardly—neglecting study in the Word, personal prayer and intimate fellowship with God and His church. In addition, we must continually reach out to help others see the truth, or we will be left with a form of dead religion without the life of God.

While we are receptive to the wonderful workings of the Holy Spirit in our day, we must be watchful in this hour. Our own well-being, as well as the salvation of other people, is dependent on how spiritually alert we are.

Instead of falling away, if we guard our hearts from losing fervent love for Jesus and His Word and maintain a servant’s heart, we can keep ourselves in the faith. We can also help keep those we are called to influence from becoming cold, lukewarm or hardened.

Those who hear and obey what the Spirit of God is saying will sense an urgency in this hour to make any changes that are needed. If there were no possibility for Christians to be deceived, Jesus would not have warned us about it. I believe He is warning us still.

Though Satan is the author of every evil thing, we can't continue to blame him for everything.

Prayer is open, two-way communication in which God and His creatures speak and listen to one another.

Read a companion devotional.

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