

Reflections on Newsboys' George Perdikis and the Apostasy of Christian Believers

The news that George Perdikis, co-founder of The Newsboys, has renounced the Lord and proclaimed himself an atheist brought shock and pain to believers who have been blessed by their music for years. But now, rather than attacking him as if he somehow sinned against us, we should be praying for his restoration and asking why it is that so many are falling away.

Of course, the good news is that worldwide Jesus continues to build His church and the gates of hell are not prevailing against it, and there are far more coming to faith than falling away from the faith.

But in America and Europe, the large number of those turning away from the Lord or simply declaring themselves "nones" (having no religious affiliation) is a matter of real concern.

Why, then, are so many backsliding?

1) Many were not truly saved in the first place.

One pastor once said, "The reason some people backslide is because they never frontslid." How true!

This is especially relevant in contemporary Christian music (CCM), where it is an open secret that many gifted performers are just that: gifted performers, no more, no less.

I always give the benefit of the doubt and believe the best about people whom I don't know personally, and so, if a person claims to know the Lord, I'll take them at their word unless

there is proof to the contrary. In the same way, if a band claims to be Christian, I'll assume they are.

At the same time, I'm aware of claims that only 1 in 10 "Christian" bands is really Christian, while others within the industry have told me that they witnessed lots of drug use, drinking and immorality among the "Christian" performers.

In fact, one former CCM executive told me that he saw just as much drug abuse and immorality in "Christian" music circles as he did in secular music circles, the exception being that in the "Christian" circles, the performers tried to hide it more.

I hope this is not true today, but for obvious reasons, we should have serious concerns.

2) Many have shallow roots.

In the parable of the sower (found in Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8), Jesus spoke about the seeds that "fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away" (Matt. 13:5-6).

He then explained the meaning to His disciples: "As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away" (Matt. 13:20-21).

There are many shallow-root believers in the body today, having come to faith through a superficial, what's-in-it-for-me kind of message, having no depth to their faith and commitment and no depth in their personal relationship with God.

Yet in today's spiritual climate in America, they might go on

for a while without ever encountering “tribulation or persecution” because of the Word. In other words, things are so compromised in so many parts of the church of America that a compromised believer with shallow roots might fit in just fine with both the world and the church.

In contrast, a serious believer will quickly encounter opposition from the world, and sometimes from the professing church as well. Those with deep roots will endure and thrive. Those with shallow roots will not.

3) Many believers are not prepared for the intensity of the onslaught.

Jesus often warned against deception, as did the apostles, and Peter called his readers to be “sober-minded” and “watchful,” because our “adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

How much more should we take that to heart today?

Has any generation had as much access to pornography and gambling and other vices as our generation? Has any generation been as bombarded by filth as ours?

This calls for greater vigilance.

As the old saying goes, being forewarned is being fore-equipped.

Unfortunately, many believers have not recognized that, with greater attacks, there must be greater vigilance, because of which many have fallen away through the seductiveness of sin.

Whether or not these are the specific days Jesus warned about in Matthew 24:12 (“because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold”), they are certainly similar days.

Be on guard!

4) Many have been burned by legalism and by church failures.

Many believers have been burned by legalism, which I define as externally imposed religion, specifically, laws without love, religion without relationship, and standards without a Savior.

And since they associate this man-made version of the faith with the real faith, when they continually find themselves falling short or else imagine the gospel to be a set of rules alone, they reject Jesus Himself.

Others have been burned by the failures of the church today—our hypocrisy, our scandals, our divisions, our politicizing of the gospel—and since this is the only church they know, they assume that something is wrong with the whole Christian faith.

Still others have been burned by a lack of discipleship and fathering, and since they find little true community and few real fathers and mothers in the faith, “This whole Jesus thing can’t be true.”

Tragically, many of them would have done just fine in the right environment.

5) Many simply choose sin over obedience.

In his “I’m now an atheist” announcement, George Perdikis wrote candidly, “I always felt uncomfortable with the strict rules imposed by Christianity. All I wanted to do was create and play rock and roll ... and yet most of the attention I received was focused on how well I maintained the impossible standards of religion. I wanted my life to be measured by my music, not by my ability to resist temptation.”

But aren’t all of us called to resist temptation? And doesn’t a true, vibrant relationship with the Lord empower us to resist, to the point that knowing Him so transcends everything

else that it becomes easier and easier to say no to sin? And should we take a “Christian” musician or singer or preacher or writer seriously if they don’t live what they preach?

The problem for many believers is that, in the words of the old song by Keith Green (speaking on behalf of the Lord), “You love the world and you’re avoiding Me.”

And so, for them, the issue is not with failures in the church or legalism or other things outside of us.

The problem is inside of them, in their hearts and minds, where they choose to gratify themselves rather than deny themselves, to walk in the flesh rather than the Spirit.

That is the guaranteed path to death and destruction.

The good news is that God restores backsliders (if that’s you, I’d encourage you to visit), and so there is still hope for many who have fallen away.

For the rest of us, let’s put our trust in the keeping power of the Lord, believing that He who began the good work will bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6).

And let’s not play games, remembering the words of Paul: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

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