

Are We Living in the Days of the Great Apostasy?

Jesus has been betrayed again—this time by wayward denominations that question the truth of the Bible and reject Christian morality.

I believe we are living in the days of the Great Apostasy. Whether we are in the early stages or nearing the end will be known only in hindsight. But that we are in the throes of the greatest “falling away” the church has ever experienced is clear.

Jesus informed His disciples that the kingdom of heaven (His presence on earth through the church) would be infiltrated by the enemies of God (see Matt. 13:24-30,36-43). He prophesied that while everyone was sleeping, an enemy (the devil) would come and sow weeds among the wheat.

The wheat (that is, believers) and weeds (sons of the evil one) would grow together in the world. At the end of the age, Jesus will send angels to collect the weeds for burning and to harvest the wheat. He puts it this way: “The Son of Man will send out His angels and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil” (Matt. 13:41, NIV).

Jesus warned of a time when “many will turn away from the faith” and “many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Matt. 24:10-11). We have seen this prophecy repeatedly fulfilled throughout history, and yet what we see happening today in the church has not been seen since the days of the Borgia and Medici popes.

Aspects of the final “Great Apostasy” are spoken of in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. And as with many prophecies, there is most likely an initial fulfillment within a generation of the

prophecy; perhaps multiple, partial fulfillments as history progresses; and one final and complete fulfillment awaiting mankind on the last day.

In Acts 20:29-31, after admonishing the presbyters in the Ephesian church to carefully watch over the flock put under their care by God, the apostle Paul warns: "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears."

The Bible warns of a day like ours, when the world will become so corrupt that even so-called "believers" will fall away. Their separating themselves from true Christians will show that they are not of them (see 1 John 2:19).

We are seeing these Scriptures fulfilled today, as denominations, leaders and other believers turn from the Lord to serve themselves and the kingdom of darkness.

Apostasy Then and Now

It was not odd in the early church for there to be weeds among the wheat. In 1 Timothy 1:19-20, we see the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who Paul says had "shipwrecked their faith" by rejecting both faith and good conscience. Paul hands them over to Satan "to be taught not to blaspheme" and later warns: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

Then he says: "The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

In the early centuries of the church, we can see Paul's prediction played out in the Judaizers, Arians and Gnostics who continually bled the church of those who professed to be "believers." In a way, they were pruning tools in the devil's hand, serving the purposes of God. In more recent centuries, we've seen ongoing apostasy through the rise of various cults such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Today, however, we see the falling away taking place primarily from within the structures of the church itself—Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic. It's akin to the decomposition that happens when a long-buried artifact is exposed to the light. As God begins to subject the visible church to a more intense and holy gaze, parts of it are disintegrating into dust. Satan's weeds are being exposed and have only power, money and the pretense of lies to perpetuate their charade.

We see leaders inside Christian seminaries, denominations and churches who pretend to be servants of God yet who deliberately deny the clear word of truth found in Scripture. Yet millions of people remain in those churches, send their children to those seminaries and do nothing to correct the situation. What is worse, they continue to fund the ongoing apostasy with their tithes and offerings and become deceived as a penalty for their collusion.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, we read Paul's comments about a coming "rebellion" and about how those who "[refuse] to love the truth" and who "[delight] in wickedness" are given over by God Himself to "a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (vv. 10-12).

Paul sees them as collaborators or agents of the kingdom of darkness. In 2 Corinthians 11 he speaks of them as teaching "another Jesus" and imparting a different spirit and gospel (v. 4, NKJV). In verses 13-15, he writes: "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an

angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve" (NIV).

In 2 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul speaks of the "last days" once again and says they will be characterized by the existence of those who are "lovers of themselves" and "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (vv. 2,4). He says they will "[have] a form of godliness but [deny] its power" (v. 5).

As Satan, through this appearance of light, spreads his darkness more intensely across the land, God is simultaneously ratcheting up the intensity of His light. The hypocrisy, the compromise, the immorality that He once waited patiently to see forsaken by His people is no longer able to stand that refining light, and its devotees are shifting even more blatantly into the kingdom that will sustain it—the kingdom of darkness—the synagogue of Satan (see Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

The Judas Church

What we are seeing in our day is the rise of the "Judas Church."

Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Christ, was more than an individual. He was a type. His life and actions represent a pattern that has been repeated throughout church history and that has finally culminated in our day as the Great Apostasy.

Judas was someone who pretended to be a faithful follower of Christ, yet stole from the one he called Lord, eventually becoming a traitor (see John 12:4-6; Luke 6:16). Many speculate that he was somehow saved in the end, but the Scripture is clear that he was not (see Matt. 26:24; John 17:12; Acts 1:25).

In a similar way, the Judas Church robs God and His people in ways both material and spiritual and in the end turns traitor to the Lord and leads everyone in it into perdition (see Matt.

23:15).

Just try remaining faithful to God's Word today in the Episcopal Church USA (ECUSA), for example. If you dare try standing with our Lord against the enthronement of unrepentant, practicing homosexuals to the episcopate, you will likely be sued for your church properties, stripped of your salary and pension, and perhaps even defrocked from the priesthood altogether. Such draconian sanctions have already been imposed on faithful priests in that denomination by the very people who cry, "Peace and unity!" and who "celebrate diversity and tolerance." And the purging has only just begun.

It is all right if you deny the deity of Christ or His bodily resurrection or atoning sacrifice for sin. No one will bother you there. Being a Christian hasn't been a requirement for the priesthood or leadership in ECUSA or many other denominations for decades. But dare oppose the enshrining of the immorality that nailed Christ to the cross and there will be hell to pay. Yet people are still debating about whether to stay or not.

What is happening is not the sharing of differences among brothers that it is being presented as by those who have taken over the denomination. What is happening is the stupefaction of both clergy and laity by those who put allegiance to organizational unity above allegiance to Christ.

It is the same parlor trick that has been played by the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches for decades. In truth, through compromise, unbelief and misplaced loyalty, they have collectively become a synagogue of Satan—a Judas Church.

The previous presiding bishop of ECUSA, Frank Griswold, liked to issue public relations statements waxing eloquent about the facts that the denomination has always embraced diversity of opinion and that "unity amidst diversity" is its highest value. Griswold's replacement, Katharine Jefferts Schori,

parrots the same doctrine of demons in flowery language to deceive the elect.

Like Hophni and Phinehas, who despised the offering of the Lord (see 1 Sam. 2:17) and who committed sexual immorality (see v. 22), or like their father, Eli, who knew of his sons' immorality but failed to restrain them (see 1 Sam. 3:13), some modern-day ecclesiastical leaders pretend to serve God while heaping burning coals on their own heads. However, if you defy their flowery sentiments and out of faithfulness to Christ deny the legitimacy of, or obedience to, their new homosexual bishop, then one way or the other, these paragons of inclusiveness will crush you. We have only just begun to see what they will do with dissenters.

Like Judas Iscariot, the leaders of this apostasy pretend to break bread with our Lord. As if donning costumes to disguise their union with Baal, they wear the white robes instituted by God at Sinai to reflect the holy calling of the priest (see Ex. 28:39-43; Lev. 16:4). With professions of love for Christ they betray Him, as it were, with a kiss, selling their souls for power, prestige and pieces of silver.

The Future of the Church

Because of his ongoing duplicity, there came a time when Satan entered Judas and he went out to betray the Lord (see Luke 22:1-6). This is why I do not expect to see any turnaround in those denominations that have been living in compromise—supporting the murder of children in their mothers' wombs, knowingly ordaining practicing homosexuals and adulterers, forsaking the Word of God as their infallible guide for faith and doctrine, and teaching others to do the same.

When you see the abomination in the holy place, it is already too late. In other words, when you see the overt display of apostasy being sanctioned by the majority of the leaders

within a denomination, Satan has already gained too much ground for that communion to be saved. Having forsaken God's expressed will for so long, having denied themselves the grace of God that flows only to the repentant heart, having refused to demonstrate their professed love of Him through obedience, they have built their houses on sand and are going down.

God will not override the ongoing willful choices of human beings. He will give them into the hands of their lovers, and it will be those lovers who punish them. Satan has entered the ECUSA and other denominations already, and the final act of betrayal is at hand. The only choice faithful followers of Christ have left to them at this point is to flee from the wrath that is to come—to flee before they become so deceived through sloth and compromise that they stand staring into the coming destruction and are lost.

This warning applies to more than those in the ECUSA, however. That denomination is only the most glaring example at the moment. Satan has been at work in the leadership of other communions for so long that they are already set on autopilot for destruction. For example, we are probably not far away from the official sanctioning of homosexual behavior in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

Many actions and decisions in the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church USA are also frighteningly representative of the final stages of apostasy, despite the many good and faithful people who remain in membership. The United Church of Christ has been terminal for decades, having formally endorsed gay marriage as well as welcoming into membership the largest homosexual church in the nation.

And as for the Metropolitan Community Church (the gay church), it has never been a Christian body. It was stillborn from the beginning by rebellion against the Lord it claims to love and serve.

Sadly, many independent, charismatic, fundamentalist and evangelical churches are also guilty of apostasy. Hardly a week goes by before another story of immorality, power grabs or blatant thievery is uncovered among the leadership of one church or another. The Judas Church can be found everywhere and under every guise.

How do we respond? We separate ourselves from it. We refrain from attending it and supporting it. We stop turning our heads the other way and pretending as if nothing is wrong. We speak up, expose the darkness and declare the truth of God's Word.

In the book *Bishops in the Church*, Anglican clergyman and author John R.W. Stott showed us the way when he wrote: "Both our Lord and His apostles did not shrink when necessary from the task of exposing and overthrowing false teaching.

Distasteful and even dangerous as it is, we cannot conscientiously avoid the same task ourselves. Indeed, in today's church, ravaged by many grievous wolves, there is a great need for good and faithful shepherds, who will not only feed the sheep but rout the wolves."

Shepherd or sheep, clergy or laity, it's our job to rout the wolves. How successful we are will determine the future of the church.

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