

6 Lessons From Appalling End-Times Apostasy

The Roman Catholic Church is going through another season of sexual scandals, appalling cover-ups and indefensible hypocrisy.

More than last month's salacious Grand Jury report in Pennsylvania, revealing 300 clergy and church officials in 1,000 child-abuse cases, this scandal may trace to the very Vatican, itself. It is reported that the root of this tragic series of revelations is active, aggressive homosexuality, apparently practiced by some church leaders and candidates.

The disappointment, discouragement and disillusionment of faithful adherents have grown to unprecedented new levels. Some church officials have even publicly questioned if this may be the "final trial" in the end-times, which they have studied in Scripture and taught about in catechisms and seminaries.

You see, the Catholic catechism confirms a major, future heresy in the church: "Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many the form of a religious deception which will be one of apostasy" (CCC 675).

The apostle Paul told the believers in Thessalonica that the season of God's wrath (Rev. 6:12-17), known prophetically throughout the Old Testament as the Day of the Lord, won't come until "a falling away comes first (2 Thess. 2:3)." The Greek word used is *apostasia*, and means a defection, rejection or rebellion against God. It is preceded in the original text with a definite article, "the," stressing a specific apostasy, as taught by Jesus in Matthew 24.

Paul's first letter to the saints in that Gentile church

explained that God has not destined believers to incur His end-times wrath (1 Thess. 5:9) “but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” Someone has clarified it, saying “He did not select us to condemn us.” Whether we are still alive or dead physically at Christ’s appearing, true believers will spiritually live together with Him and share His life eternally ().

The short, 25-verse epistle of St. Jude appeals to those who were truly “called by God” (v. 1) to “contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (v. 3).” It is focused on urging them to discern the false teachers and leaders among them who were immoral, covetous, proud and divisive. These false leaders are actually “ungodly men, who pervert the grace of our God into immorality (v. 4 b).” There are several lessons we can learn from this small, instructive, and timely epistle.

First, religious authorities may actually “pervert the grace of our God into immorality” and thereby derail the faith of many, victimizing others by their own debauchery and perversion. The Greek word for “immorality” here is *aselgeia* and usually implies sexual licentiousness. It is found in a list of vices, together with other words for sexual immorality like orgies, adultery and fornication (see Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21). Those who practice such works of the flesh will be unable to “inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

Second, the apostate religious leaders in Jude’s day not only destroyed their own morals but also their minds and status with God. Instead of living with the destiny of the highest order of God’s creation, they reverted to animal instincts, acting on unrestrained sexual impulses. Ordained to represent man to God, their licentious lifestyles corrupted their character and natural gifts (Jude 10).

Jude related poetically about their empty and wasted lives: “[they] care only for themselves. They are clouds without

water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; raging waves of the sea, which are foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom the gloom of darkness has been kept forever (12b-13)."

Third, the only things which will stand in the face of the onslaught of apostasy in the last days will be the preservation of truth and morality by submitting to the teachings of the apostles. Verse 15 begins a series of warnings and exhortations. Jude warns that our Lord is coming to execute judgement and convince or convict the godless of their wicked ways and words.

"In the last days there will be scoffers who will walk after their own ungodly desires. These are the men who cause divisions, sensual, devoid of the Spirit (vv. 18-19)." Being "devoid of the Spirit," their motivations and methods are worldly-minded or humanistic.

Forth, we need to maintain our personal, spiritual disciplines and devotion, while we continue to "contend earnestly for the faith" in this polluted and godless world. Jude exhorts us to "...build yourselves up in your most hold faith. Pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in the love of God while you are waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which leads to eternal life (vv. 20, 21)."

We are humanly weak in the face of spiritually-apostate opposition. But the gap can be overcome if we draw wisdom and strength from the Holy Spirit. Paul teaches us that the Spirit brings both clarity and courage, for "the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

Paul taught the Corinthians about praying in a Spirit-initiated, unknown tongue to enable them (and us) to communicate effectively with God and edify ourselves in the

process (1 Cor. 14:2-4). This private prayer language leads us into the “mind of the Spirit,” as He intercedes for us “according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27).”

Fifth, Jude reminds us that these last days provide us with even more mission and ministry. We may face opposition within the church and even persecution from these defectors from the faith and we must use discernment as we continue to “contend earnestly for the faith.” Jude encourages us to “keep ourselves in the love of God () and try to convince those who “deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” of the truth with God-given compassion and concern, “pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment stained by the flesh (v. 23).”

Finally, No. 6, Jude concludes this epistle with a memorable benediction, reminding the readers that our eternal God is “able to keep you from falling.” This word “falling” is translated from the Greek word *aptaistos* and is often used to describe a surefooted horse that does not stumble. It teaches us here that God is able to keep us from stumbling into doctrinal error or unintentional sin. (See Ps. 66:9 and 121:3.)

As these last days intensify the spiritual battle, let us predetermine that no matter what we face we will not reject our faith nor renounce Jesus Christ as the Son God, who lived, died, and is coming again for those who confess him and believe in Him (Rom. 10:9-11) as our Savior and Lord. Let us encourage one another to keep the commandments of God and our testimony of faith in Jesus the Christ (Rev. 2:13; 12:17; 14:12).