

The Very Biblical Doctrine Of Real Apostasy



1. Apostasy happens when a member of Christ's Church and Covenant, a recipient of God's saving grace, rejects the authority of Christ, His Church or His Covenant commands as demonstrated by acts of reckless defiance and disobedience to the justice (i.e. repentance) mandated by those authorities¹. The consequences of such unrepentance are the loss of their former justification, forgiveness and salvation with no hope of regaining those things in the future, having been permanently removed from God's book of life and forever sealed in their unrepentant, damned state:

1.1. As it re: to Christ (Mat 12:22-37) = Speaking against the person of Jesus was forgivable. However, rejecting the authority by which He spoke (i.e. the Holy Spirit) was not. Attributing Jesus' ability to cast out demons to the devil (versus God) made the Pharisees guilty of this very crime and therefore also unable to be forgiven (or apostate). Such blasphemy was the "eternal sin" (see Mar 3:22-30).

1.2. As it re: to His Church (Deu 17:9-13) – "presumptuously" = Literally, sins w/a high hand (see Num 15:30-31) – "utterly cut off" w/"his iniquity on him" = Dies in apostasy or w/o forgiveness/salvation; (Mat 16:16-19) – "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God [the Davidic king w/divine authority]"... "on this [rock of authority] I will build my church" (*which is why*) "I will give you [my church] the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"; (Joh 20:21-23) – "Receive the Holy Spirit" [As promised, the mantle of divine authority has been passed to you – see again Mat 12:31-32; Act 15:28] (*which is why*) "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."; (Mat 18:15-20) = Notice Jesus supports the declaration of apostasy levelled against the person who refuses the His Church's instruction/judgment.²

1.3. As it re: to the commands of His Covenant (Deu 29:18-20; Heb 6:1-8, 10:23-30; e.g. Act 21:21 – "forsake Moses" [ἀποστασίαν= apostasy... from the Law]).

2. Seeing that Christ, Covenant and Church are the essentials of the gospel message means their rejection by the apostate represents nothing less than the embracing of a different gospel – something the Bible equally testifies to as damning (Gal 1:6-9).

3. Denying apostasy is something that can happen to the elect or real Christians (it only happens to the non-elect/fake Christians)³:

3.1. Is based on an unbiblical view of election and God's protection of those who are saved (1Th 1:4 w/3:5) = Election refers to God's choosing a person to be justified/become a part of Christ's Church not a guarantee they will continue in that state unto eternal salvation. That was determined by the individual's behavior after rec'g such grace. Though there are passages that speak to God protecting our salvation, they are not unconditional or in spite of our actions to the contrary (2Pe 1:5-11).⁴

3.2. Makes God guilty of lying not only in relation to the threat of apostasy but also a coming judgment according to our deeds (since both of these are communicated as realities in Scripture). Consider (1Co 9:24-27; 2Co 5:9-11) = Based on these two passages, Paul viewed both apostasy and condemnation at the time of final judgment to be a real possibility for the Christian – and therefore also a real motivation to faithful obedience.

4. The parable of the soils reveals not only the reality of apostasy but its commonplace and underlying causes (Mat 13:18-23) = Two of the three individuals in Jesus' parable represent people who became real Christians (they "rec'd the Word w/joy") yet later apostasized (21 - "falls away", 22- "proves unfruitful" – same phrases/ideas used to refer to apostasy in Heb 6:6-8). Given Jesus' purpose for sharing (i.e. to advance our understanding of God's kingdom on earth), we should - at the very least, conclude that only a few of those who come into the kingdom will remain until the end (1/3?) (See Mat 7:13-14 and Luk 13:23-24). What can also be concluded is that the underlying causes/reasons are the person's heart and/or lack of understanding (19, 23; See also Luk 8:15 – "an honest and good heart"). IOW: those who apostasize have deceived hearts and minds (Jer 17:9). They have decided to listen to their feelings and the world rather than God's Word. Hence the reason for the warning and instruction of (Rom 12:3 – "Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed thru the renewing of your mind") and (Heb 3:12-14) = Notice it is us who are called to "take care" so that apostasy doesn't happen. Our election/God's protection are not mentioned as factors of our preservation or protection.

5. God's unforgiving, vengeful spirit, supreme anger and abhorrence for the apostate person is justified given the supreme betrayal, abuse and blasphemy of Christ committed in their apostasy. They are viewed as the most wicked of all disobedient people (Heb 10:26-30) = God's unforgiving spirit (26 – "no longer remains a sacrifice for sins"; Deu 29:20), God's supreme anger and abhorrence (27 – "fury of fire", 29 – "outraged the Spirit of grace"; Deu 29:20; Psa 5:6 – "The Lord abhors the deceitful man" = the apostate is the most deceitful of all – claiming loyalty to God then living in betrayal), God's vengeful spirit (30- "I will repay, vengeance is

¹ "Reckless" when defined as, "a state of mind where a person intentionally and unjustifiably pursues a course of action while consciously disregarding any risks flowing from such actions" is the appropriate term to describe what is meant by the biblical terms used to explain the type defiance or disobedience exhibited by the apostate ("presumptuously", "deliberately"). This definition also agrees with that used by American law courts ("Conduct whereby the actor does not desire harmful consequence but...foresees the possibility and consciously takes the risk," or alternatively as "a state of mind in which a person does not care about the consequences of his or her actions." - Black's Law dictionary, p.1053; Bryan A. Garner ed., 8th ed. abr. 2005).

² In his letter to the Corinthian congregation, first century bishop Clement warns certain instigators to repent and submit to the ruling of the elders lest they be cast out w/ "no hope of God" (2 Clement 6:7)

³ For example, the Westminster Confession (1647, ch.17) states that, "They whom God has accepted in his Beloved, effectually elected and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved." Keeping with this line of thought, Jonathon Edwards wrote that those Christians who do fall away only "seemed" to have righteousness, but in reality, never were (*Miscellaneous Rem. 7:26-27*).

⁴ Verses used to support the idea that God unconditionally protects the believer from falling away (Phi 1:6; Rom 8:35-39; Eph 2:8-9; 2Ti 1:12; 1Th 5:23). A close contextual analysis of these verses reveal they are not teaching what the proponents of this view think.

Mine.”), the apostate’s supreme betrayal and abuse of Christ (29 – “spurned the Son of God”), the apostate’s supreme blasphemy of Christ (29 – “profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”; Mat 12:32-34), most wicked of all disobedient people (28-29 - “how much worse... [*they are than those*] who set aside the law of Moses”)⁵.

6. God’s present attitude and actions toward the apostate are similar for any person who attacks Christ, His Covenant commands or Church (Psa 105:12-15; Jer 50:17-34, 51:24; Rom 1:18 – “wrath of God is revealed against...men who...suppress the truth in unrighteousness”; 1Th 2:14-16; 2Th 1:6-10 w/2:10-12; 2Pe 2:3, 10b-12; Jud 1:8-15).

7. As a means to demonstrating our supreme loyalty and love to God (or Christ) above all others (Deu 6:5; Luk 10:27 w/Luk 14:25-35), we are commanded to imitate Him (Eph 5:1) in our attitude and actions toward the apostate or any person who attacks Christ, His Covenant commands or Church⁶:

7.1. We are to cease in our loyalty, affection, physical care and support of them (1Jo 2:10-11 contrasted w/15-19) = Based on John’s instruction in 3:16-18, “love” is to be understood as loyalty, affection and care/support (“lay down our lives”...“closes his heart”...love in deed”). This we are to possess for our true family in Christ (our “brother”), but not in re: to the “world” (i.e. people following the devil as controller of this world – 5:19). This most especially includes those who have gone out from us and become “antichrists” (i.e. the apostate or those who attack Christ or His Church⁷) (Deu 13:6-9 – “eye shall not pity” = no shedding tears)⁸.

7.2. We are to express hate, disgust and offense in re: to them (Psa 119:158 – “faithless” = The apostate; Psa 101:3; Psa 139:21-22⁹; Act 13:4-10 = Paul’s attitude toward those who attacked Christ or His people was the same as the for the apostate; Consider also David’s words to Goliath who mocked God and His people – 1Sa 17:26)¹⁰.

7.3. We are to break from all forms of fellowship w/them (2Co 6:14-18) – “unbelievers” (ἄπιστος) = faithless, a term used to refer to the apostate and those who attack Christ and His Church (See 2Ch 30:1-7) = Israel is called back to God before they become like their descendants who were “faithless” – i.e. apostate and “destroyed w/o hope”. The LXX renders this (ἀφίστημι) = to fall away, go apostate (same word used in Luk 8:13; Heb 3:12).

7.4. We are to do everything to never speak to them or be around them unless other obligations require it (Tit 3:10-11) = The second warning Paul is referring to is in re: to the Church and therefore refers to a person who (b/c of their rejection), is now “self-condemned” – or apostate. We are to remove ourselves completely from any contact w/them that is not necessary -i.e. situations that already exist requiring we be around them (e.g. Parents w/minor children, spouses, work environments).¹¹

7.5. When we speak of them we must identify them as evil/wicked and warn other Christians of the danger they present (Isa 5:20; 2Ti 4:14-15 w/1Ti 1:20 = Alexander was an apostate and man who attacked God’s people).

8. Anything less than the above attitudes and actions toward the apostate or any person who attacks Christ/His Commands/Church:

8.1. Encourages further blasphemy against Christ, His Covenant commands and Church since it gives the impression that we are ashamed of what we believe or don’t care about God’s honor (Ecc Rom 1:16).

8.2. Destroys our witness/evangelism of those who are watching since no one wants to follow a God whose followers don’t fight for His honor but rather allow Him, His people or ways to be trashed and act almost apologetic in the way they say anything about it. Hence the reason the Muslim religion is the fastest growing on the planet. Jesus fought for God’s honor and against these individuals which made Him offensive to His them (Mat 10:14, 15:12 versus Act 10:34 and Mat 9:36 – “the crowds” = Those teachable and seeking Him).

8.3. Invites judgment against the rest of the congregation (Lev 27:28 w/Jos 6:18, 7:13, 25; Deu 7:26, 13:17; 2Jo 1:9-11 = By your compromise you become devoted to destruction and then come into the covenant community bringing destruction on the rest of us – like Achan w/Israel).

8.4. Will mean forfeiting Christ as our Savior (Rom 12:11; Mat 10:32-37) = Jesus views our lack of separation as loving the apostate/Christ-attacker more than Him, and therefore a denial and forfeiture of Him as our Savior (“not worthy of Me”).

⁵ It is for these reasons that apostasy was historically likened to crimes such as treason, desertion, or mutiny.

⁶ Being imitators of God is what it means to be human since this was why God created us. Unlike humanism then, this does not mean acceptance, approval or inaction toward those humans whose behavior is sinful and wicked since by their actions they destroy the image that is our true humanity (Pro 28:4).

⁷ The church has historically understood the term, “antichrists” as referring to those who are apostate or attacking Christ and His Church.

⁸ God’s affection (true love) is conditional. The world’s affection (“self as god”-love) is unconditional.

⁹ To express hatred or disgust for those who are our enemies in no way contradicts Jesus’ teaching in Mat 5:48 (“Love your enemies”) since He also calls us to pray for them (meaning their destruction) as well as to continue viewing them as our enemies. Love in that context refers to (like God) being righteous (rather than evil) in our actions toward them (practical love). We are to treat all people righteously (or according to what the Law requires) since this is the definition of (practical) love (Rom 13:8-10). This however again does not negate expressing our disapproval, disgust and cutting off of those who deserve it. To act differently w/b wicked (again Pro 28:4).

¹⁰ All persons are capable of such expressions. They are the result of caring about God’s honor and choosing to see the apostate/Christ-attacker as God does. A Christian who will not respond this way to such people is not only being disobedient to God, but a hypocrite in their daily prayer which begins w/this very commitment (to fight for God’s honor – Mat 6:9 – “Hallowed by Your Name”). They clearly love self/others more than Christ.

¹¹ Examples of the discussed actions and attitude from the lives of the Apostle John and Polycarp (the disciple of John) as told to the Church Father, Irenaeus: “There are those who heard from [Polycarp] that John, the disciple of the Lord, going to bathe at Ephesus, and perceiving Cerinthus [the apostate] within, rushed out of the bath-house without bathing, exclaiming, “Let us fly, lest even the bath-house fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.” And Polycarp himself replied to Marcion, who met him on one occasion, and said, “Dost thou know me?” “I do know thee, the first-born of Satan.” Such was the horror which the apostles and their disciples had against holding even verbal communication with any corrupters of the truth; as Paul also says, “A man that is an [apostate], after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” [Tit 3:10] - Irenaeus (Against Heresies, 3.4.)