

A Pattern Of Apostasy

Introduction. From passages such as Hebrews 2:1; 3:12-13; 4:1, 11; 12:14-15, we understand that one can fall away from fellowship with God. This falling away is due to a failure on our part to watch, wait and take warning (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). The digression into apostasy does not come swiftly. It enters by stealth through those who would appear as being righteous (Acts 20:29-31). We are going to notice several steps of apostasy. This digression is recognized by God as recorded in Psalm 1:1. The progression from walk to stand to sit will perfectly mirror the different stages of people falling away from the living God.

I. ***Flirtation And Consideration***

- A. This first stage is where there are no alarm bells sounding. The error is usually ignored and considered inconsequential. The general thinking is that those who uphold the truth will stop the lurking evil in its tracks.
- B. Potiphar's wife probably caught Joseph by surprise (Genesis 39:12), but when the situation warranted action, Joseph took the right course (1 Corinthians 6:18; Proverbs 5:8; 14:9; Ephesians 5:11).
- C. Curiosity also begins at this point. The discussion of the wrong activity begins to be tossed around. As some will want to progress further, others will take warning and expose the potential danger that exists.

II. ***Toleration And Accommodation***

- A. This is the step where some start to be less dogmatic about holding to a form or pattern of doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1). Although there are still some would who would apologize for the error, some will make excuses that would act as a shield for both directions. To one side they will say, "It is not really that bad," and to the other side, "They are just not used to change." Does God change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8)?
- B. They begin to teach that we cannot know the will of God with complete certainty.
 1. This is where some will offer "gray areas" as a justification of not really being sure. If they are not really sure on the matter, maybe they should not make a big disturbance over whatever topic is under consideration.
 2. Some examples of Bible topics where this is used are marriage, divorce, remarriage, immodest dress, theistic evolution, continual cleansing, unity in diversity, fellowship, the existence of eternal punishment, the deity of Christ, the work of women in the church, etc.

III. **Cooperation And Contamination**

- A. Error is not rebuked at this point. The local church does not feel threatened by teaching which is contrary to sound words.
- B. New alliances are formed and what is so unnerving and scary is that the authority of the scriptures is viewed differently. The tenants of Bible authority (command, example and necessary inference) are ridiculed as "old-fashioned."
- C. Not only is error not rebuked, but it is embraced. These folks now seek to distance themselves from those who are narrow-minded and intolerant of new and different ways. They repudiate "traditionalists."
- D. The message of truth has changed to embrace everyone and is not limited only to the faithful few.

IV. **Capitulation And Condemnation**

- A. Those who once were considered the enemies of the cross are now embraced as brethren of God. They exchange pulpits and their "message," heard by the local brethren on a weekly basis, is watered down.
- B. New bolder errors show their ugly head and there is nothing that anyone can do to stop them from happening (Isaiah 30:8-11; Jeremiah 5:30-31; Nehemiah 9:26-31).
- C. This is the step where there is condemnation of the preachers of righteousness and those who faithfully follow the scriptures.
 - 1. Those who promote the truth are pictured as the vilest of all creatures: cruel, unloving and unmerciful. Why? Because error and those who teach it are exposed.
 - 2. We teach that their current lust is evil and opposed to sound doctrine. We tell them that they cannot do what they want to do if they want to go to heaven. It is born of an earnest desire to bring someone back to the truth (James 5:19-20).
- D. Of course, the real question is who will have the ultimate condemnation (Matthew 7:21-23; 15:8-9, 14; 23:27-33)?

Conclusion. God reserves judgment for all those who transgress His laws and His will. Let us take notice of these trends and take up the cause of Christ. Let us hold forth the gospel message in its purity. Let us maintain the purity of the church, and rely upon the authority of scripture as our guide. May God have mercy upon us all.