

The Price Of Apostasy

Introduction. As we make our way through life, at times we think carefully, choose wisely, and act forcefully. At times we do not. While it is true that scenarios exist in which a personal failure may be due to circumstances beyond our control, often the responsibility or failure rests solely with the individual (Joshua 24:14-15).

It is human nature for us to empathize with the person who works hard, gives his best, but still fails. But it is just as much a part of human nature that we disdain the person who — in the heat of battle — simply gives up and walks away. Nowhere is the truth of this more evident than in our relationship with God. And nowhere is failure more tragic, or the results more permanent.

I. The Possibility Of Apostasy In The Bible

A. Apostasy in the Old Testament.

1. Moses often warned the Israelites of the horrible effects of apostasy (Deuteronomy 4:9; 8:11-14; 28:62).
2. God was willing to help them conquer Canaan (Exodus 23:30; Deuteronomy 10:22), but more than once their sins reversed God's promised blessings.
3. Eventually their apostasy caused God to allow them to be taken away into captivity (2 Kings 17:18-20)., God's people had failed to count the high price of apostasy.

B. Apostasy in the New Testament.

1. During His time on Earth, Jesus warned of falling away (Luke 8:13; John 15:1-6).
2. Some of the early Christians did leave the faith.
 - a) They abandoned Christ and reverted to Judaism (Hebrews 6:4-6).
 - b) Hymenaeus and Alexander had blasphemed (1 Timothy 1:20).
 - c) Phygellus, Hermogenes, and all in Asia turned away from Paul (2 Timothy 1:15).
 - d) Hymenaeus and Philetus had overthrown their faith (2 Timothy 2:17-18).
 - e) Demas forsook Paul to go back into the world (2 Timothy 4:10).

II. Why Do Christians Leave The Faith?

A. Some fall away because they neglect their own spiritual welfare.

1. Christians have a "great salvation" that should not be neglected (Hebrews 2:3). When a person does what the Bible commands to do to be saved, he enters the kingdom as a newborn enters an earthly family (1 Peter 2:2).

2. One of the responsibilities of a Christian is to mature in their faith (2 Peter 3:18; cp. 1 Corinthians 3:2). People would never neglect their physical needs such as food and rest, yet they carelessly neglect their spiritual needs (Romans 7:4; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 10:25). As a result, they grow disinterested, and eventually drift away.
- B. Some leave the faith as a result of persecution.
1. In His parable of the sower, the Lord revealed that a person can fall away because of persecution (Matthew 13:21).
 2. People are drawn to the gospel because of its “abundant life” and its eternal life (John 3:16; 10:10). But they fail to count the cost (Luke 14:27-32; 2 Timothy 3:12). When hostility arises, their faith becomes like the seed destroyed by the noonday sun.
- C. Some abandon the faith because they fall prey to false teaching.
1. Faithful Christians will take heed how they hear (Luke 8:18; Acts 17:11). In Matthew 22:23-33, Christ rebuked the Sadducees because of their ignorance of the scriptures, and attributed their many errors to ignorance.
 2. Paul foretold of a time when some would fall away because of the doctrines of false teachers (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-7). Tens of thousands of religious groups are represented on television and the Internet, making it easy to fall victim to human doctrines.
- D. Some may have left the faith because of suffering in the world.
1. We do not inhabit a world reminiscent of the Garden of Eden — we live in a world ravaged by the effects of man’s sin (Genesis 3:16-19; Romans 5:12).
 2. Our planet is ravaged by natural disasters and our bodies are ravaged by an increasing list of diseases. These assaults stir deep-seated emotions about the benevolence and omnipotence of God, and a vibrant, living faith is displaced with the seeds of doubt.
- E. Some place their confidence in men, only to find that they have feet of clay.
1. Can you imagine the terrible influence Peter’s denial of Christ or his hypocrisy with the Jews would have had on the disciples (Matthew 26:69-74; Galatians 2:12-14)?
 2. Setting aside the damage done by trusting in man, God pronounces a curse on the one who does it (Jeremiah 17:5; cp. Psalm 20:7).
- F. Some leave the Lord because they do not have regular association with other Christians.
1. God intended us to favorably live with and use each other for mutual support (Romans 15:32; 1 Corinthians 16:18; 2 Timothy 1:16).

2. A constant exposure to the world causes commitment to God to wane. Strong brethren can be an effective balance to these forces.
- G. Some fall away as a result of the harsh and inappropriate actions of fellow Christians.
1. Christians, whose actions may be well-intentioned, can “lay it on the line” so harshly that it drives the weak and worldly away instead of gently turning them back.
 2. If we answer non-Christians with “grace,” “gentleness,” and “respect” (Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15), should we not do the same with Christians (cp. Galatians 6:1)?

III. The True Price Of Apostasy

- A. The cost to the person.
1. Peter paints an ugly picture of those who leave the faith (2 Peter 2:21-22). They once understood the promise of eternal life. They once enjoyed the fellowship of other saints. But now, all of that is gone, having been replaced with the knowledge of spending an eternity in the absence of God (2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 21:8).
 2. As the days pass, what will run through the mind of the apostate? In more private moments, his knowledge of what he knows he should do but refuses to do will eat away at his inner peace (Philippians 2:10-11; James 4:17).
- B. The cost to families.
1. Recluses are truly rare (Genesis 2:18; Romans 14:7). From the beginning to the end of our pilgrimage, we interact socially with those around us. We fall in love, marry, bear and raise children, and become grandparents and great-grandparents.
 2. The decisions we make, and the actions that stem from them, affect those we love. What a sobering thought — that one person, through behavior tempered by a reverent fear of God, might influence a sinner to be saved (Micah 5:7; 1 Peter 3:1-2).
 3. But if faithfulness produces wonderful results, what results might unfaithfulness produce? The children for years witnessed the calloused, spiritual indifference of their parents. They were rarely, if ever, taken to worship God or attend Bible class. Their parents have returned to God, but experience tells us it is highly unlikely that they ever will. Because of the parent’s unfaithfulness at a critical time, the opportunity to impart a living, active faith to those impressionable children has been lost forever.
- C. The cost to the church.
1. On occasion, however, it is not just physical families that suffer due to a member’s unfaithfulness. Usually the church suffers as well.

- The sin of a single individual can have severe repercussions for those around him (1 Corinthians 5:6).
2. Just to choose one example, suppose that a Christian commits adultery and leaves his wife and family. What would this do?
 - a) The church's reputation will be damaged. A Christian's actions are interpreted by non-Christians as representative of what Christians should be (Matthew 5:16).
 - b) These circumstances will provide ample weapons for those who are searching for ammunition to revile the church and its members (1 Timothy 5:14).
 - c) Also, as they see a man who was once a faithful Christian abandon his faith, it can have a devastating effect on weak and new Christians (Proverbs 25:19).

Conclusion. Sad as it may be, sinners were once lost, but were offered salvation as the gift of God. Yet they spurned the Lord's gift, choosing instead to relinquish Heaven for a meager measure of earthly pottage. What an unbecoming trade — and at what a terrible price! Surely they have failed to count the high cost of apostasy.

While Christians may freely choose to walk away from their faith in God, no power can take that faith from them without their consent (Romans 8:35-37). While some Christians fall away, it does not have to be so (2 Peter 1:10).