

Lesson 19
The Awful Possibility of Apostasy
Hebrews 6:6-9

You may have had the experience of attempting to lead a person to Christ who is totally indifferent and hardened to Christ. This person may have been raised in a Christian home and attended Sunday School and church at one time in his life. You may find out that he at one time worked with some Christian organization as a staff worker or as an evangelist or preacher. You may even know some converts who came to Christ under his ministry. Yet, when you try to explain Christ to him he says, "I once believed all that stuff about Christ and Christianity - sin, atonement, faith, heaven and hell - but I don't anymore. In fact, I think biblical Christianity is a myth and Christ is a hoax." As you try to persuade him of Christ, he becomes more hardened to what you are trying to tell him. What is this person's problem? According to the Bible, he may only be a professor of Christ with no true saving faith and he may be on the verge of apostasy.

Hebrews 6:3-9 is a very sobering passage for it tells us about apostates. An apostate is one who has adopted Christianity as his religion and advances in it to some degree but then turns back to his original paganism or old religion. An apostate is one who has had great intellectual knowledge of Christ and has experienced many of the external benefits of Christianity and yet he has no true saving faith. An apostate turns completely away from Christ and not only wants nothing to do with Christ but actively works against Him. An apostate is one who has professed faith in Christ but because his heart is hardened by the sin of unbelief, he refuses to genuinely believe, yield and submit to Christ.

Why is apostasy such a dangerous thing? If a person falls into apostasy, there is the awful possibility that he might not ever be able to trust Christ and be saved. A person might become so hardened to the external wooing of the Holy Spirit that he may never believe and be saved.

THE EARLY STEPS TO APOSTASY - Hebrews 6:3-5

"And this we will do if God permits." -- The author has called upon these professing Hebrew-Christians to "press on to maturity" (6:1) and most will do so, but there are some who God will not permit to go on into maturity because they are only professors of Christ and on the verge of apostasy.

In the context of the Book of Hebrews, the apostates are those who had left Christianity to go back into Judaism, ***"Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near"*** (Heb. 10:25), but there were others who were seriously thinking of abandoning Christ for Moses. It is to these who were contemplating this move that the author gives this warning concerning the danger of apostasy.

"For in the case of those who had once been enlightened ..." -- You will notice in 5:11—6:2, the author addressed those who he thought were really saved as "you" and "us" but in 6:3-8, he

refers to another group of people and addresses them as “those” and “them.” These are the apostates or the professors who are on the verge of apostasy. They have been enlightened with a full knowledge of the fact of the gospel but they never laid hold of Christ by faith. They had knowledge without the reality of Christ.

“And have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the power of the age to come ...” -- They had tasted, sampled and dabbled in spiritual things but they really never went all the way with Christ. Many of the external benefits of Christ’s were theirs - they had knowledge of Christ; they had been baptized and were affiliated with a local church; they even experienced something of Christ. Yet, they were never ever saved because they refused to commit themselves to Christ.

Nowhere are the works of election, calling, regeneration or justification mentioned in these verses. These works are all salvation works but these professing Hebrew-Christians had none of these saving works. Why? They were only professors and not possessors of Christ.

These verses show how far into Christianity a person may penetrate and how many unusual benefits he may enjoy without actually becoming a true child of God.

THE ACT OF APOSTASY - Hebrews 6:6a

“And then have fallen away ...” -- Who is it that falls away? It is not a true Christian but only those who are professors. These professors had all the benefits and privileges of the external work of the Holy Spirit and still turned away because of unbelief, hardness of heart and rejection.

This verse does teach that it is possible for a professing Christian to fall away and apostatize but it is not possible for a true Christian to fall away and apostatize.

THE DANGER OF APOSTASY - Hebrews 6:6b

“It is impossible to renew (restore) them again to repentance ...” -- An apostate is in a terrifying position, for once he falls into apostasy, he cannot under any circumstances be saved - **“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO RESTORE THEM AGAIN TO REPENTANCE!”** These professing Hebrew-Christians had outwardly repented once (changed their minds about Christ) and turned to Christianity from Judaism. They had made an initial profession of faith, but their repentance was not genuine. They appeared to be saved for a while but when the persecutions came from the unbelieving world, they buckled under the pressure. They progressively moved away from Christ, compromising their convictions and became more and more hardened in unbelief so that it was impossible to renew them again to repentance. By going back into Judaism, they were going into a religion that was apostate, for Christ fulfilled all the types and shadows of Old Testament Judaism.

The impossibility of bringing an apostate to repentance does not rest with God, for God has the power to save whom He pleases, but it is not in God’s purpose to save an apostate because of his hardness of heart in unbelief. God only saves those who in genuine faith turn to Christ. The apostate himself is the one who makes it impossible for him to be saved. An apostate is one who

removes himself from Christ and turns completely away from the Lord. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ and His death for sin. An apostate in total unbelief turns from Christ and will not be saved, placing himself in a situation where he cannot be saved. In his state of complete rejection and unbelief, it is impossible for God's people to restore him again to repentance. He simply will not turn back to Christ no matter how much any Christian works with him.

It is also impossible for any human being to dogmatically say that a person is an apostate. We might assume such but we cannot be sure. Only God knows when a person regresses to the point of apostasy.

Any person who appears to be on the verge of apostasy can turn back to Christ. If he turns back to Christ, he is not an apostate. However, if he does not turn back, he has reached the point of no return and it is impossible for him to be saved.

Other portions of Hebrews makes it quite clear that for apostates there is "no sacrifice for sins" and only "the expectation of judgment."

"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.' And again, 'THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:26-31).

Ray Stedman, pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto has an interesting insight into apostasy,

"Here is the question I would like to ask. Is it not possible that we frequently confuse conception with birth? If the spiritual life follows the same pattern as the physical life, we all know that physical life does not begin with birth. It begins with conception. Have we not, perhaps, mistaken conception for birth and therefore have been very confused when certain ones, who seemingly started well, have ended up stillborn? Is there in the spiritual life, as in the natural life, a gestation period before birth when true Spirit-imparted life can fail and result in a stillbirth? Is there not a time when new Christians are more like embryos, forming little by little in the womb, fed by the faith and vitality of others?

If this be the case, then the critical moment is not when the Word first meets with faith, that is conception; that is when the possibility of new life arises. But the critical moment is when the individual is asked to obey the Lord at cost to himself, contrary to his own will and desire. When in other words, the Lordship of Christ makes demands upon him

and it comes into conflict with his own desires and purposes, his own plans and program. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." In grace, the Lord may make this appeal over the course of a number of years. But if it is ultimately refused, this is a stillbirth. The months and even years that may be spent in the enjoyment of conversion joy was simply Christian life in embryo. The new birth occurs, if at all, when we first cease from our own works and rest in Jesus Christ. That is when the life of faith begins. If this step is refused and the decision is made to reject the claims of Christ to Lordship and control, there follows, as Hebrews points out, a hardening, blinding process which, if allowed to continue, may lead such a one to drop out of church, and in effect, to renounce his Christian faith. Though only God knows the true condition of the heart, if that occurs, the case, he says, is hopeless."

"Since they again (constantly) crucify to themselves the Son of God, and (constantly) put Him to open shame." -- These professing Hebrew-Christians by leaving Christianity to go back under the Old Testament Jewish system were placing themselves in a position where there was no forgiveness of sin because Christ fulfilled the Old Testament system. Now salvation is only in the reality of Christ who has come. By going back into Judaism, they show their ignorance of the shed blood of Christ and openly admit that Christ and His sacrifice are useless and inoperative. By going back into Judaism, they declare the first crucifixion was of no avail, and they place themselves under the types and shadows which pointed to the Messiah. They need a second crucifixion which is impossible because Christ has already come to die once for all for sin.

An apostate rejects Christ and in his own attitude puts Christ back on the cross, stating His death had no purpose or meaning whatsoever. In this act of rejection, the apostate declares openly that Christ's death was worthless which brings great shame to the person and work of Christ.

Years ago, just after World War II, there was a brilliant young evangelist who had a tremendous ministry with youth and spoke in the most famous-churches in America. His name was Chuck Templeton. He could expound the Word and give a clear explanation of the way of salvation. Thousands of people made professions of faith under his ministry and many were genuinely saved. Then Chuck Templeton entered into seminary, where he began to doubt his faith and little by little he drifted away from Christ. He served for a while as a national evangelist for his denomination, but finally he quit the ministry entirely and later openly and publicly renounced all faith in Jesus Christ and went back into secular work. This man is a good example of one who could be an apostate.

AN ILLUSTRATION TO PROVE APOSTASY - Hebrews 6:7-8

"For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it ..." -- Now the author uses an illustration of rain that falls on two kinds of ground. The rain pictures the work of the Holy Spirit and the ground represents two kinds of responses by men who receive the general work of the Holy Spirit.

"And brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God ..." -- The rain falls on one plot of land and brings forth fruit or vegetation. The

reason for the vegetation was that the land was tilled and made ready for the rain. The Holy Spirit enlightens many men but only those who are prepared by God and truly believe in Christ are saved. The evidence of this salvation is fruit or good works.

This person was enlightened with the general call to salvation, believed in Christ, and pushed on in Christ, producing good works. This person could not apostatize because he is a true believer.

“But if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed and it ends up being burned.” -- The rain may fall on another plot of land that is not tilled and the result is a field covered with weeds which will one day be gathered and burned, indicating a curse upon the land. The Holy Spirit enlightens many men to the truth of Christ, but some do not respond to the general call of God to salvation. They reject the truth of Christ and each rejection of Christ puts them deeper under God’s curse and if they continue to reject they shall be burned in eternal judgment.

An apostate has only eternal judgment facing him. Apostasy is a serious, serious matter!

THE MARKS OF A TRUE BELIEVER - Hebrew 6:9

“But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way.” -- Now the author stops talking about apostates (“those” and “them”) and begins again to speak to those in that assembly he thought were truly saved. He calls them “beloved” and was convinced that they were doing better things than the apostates were doing. They had spiritual works in their lives, which accompany salvation. They gave evidence with their works that they were truly saved.

CONCLUSION

If you have never made an initial act of faith towards Christ, you must do so or you will never be saved, for apart from Christ there is no salvation from sin and hell. ***“And there is salvation in no one else (Christ); for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”*** (Acts 4:12). Your responsibility is to change your mind about sin, God and Christ and to entrust yourself wholly to Christ to save you.

However, there may be some reading this who have only professed Christ and never really possessed Him as Lord and Savior. A professor of Christ is in a very dangerous situation. If you are a professor, you could easily be on the verge of falling away into apostasy. You may be presently experiencing a hardening effect in your life. The next step will be to drop out of church and remove yourself from any Christian fellowship. You may then pass the point of no return and fall into apostasy. If you fall into apostasy, you have removed yourself completely from Christ with no possibility of being saved, for it will be impossible to renew you again to repentance.

What can you do to keep from falling into apostasy? Turn in genuine saving faith and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. Yield to Him. Commit to Him and when you do turn in faith to Christ you shall be saved. Once you are saved, you will push on into maturity and bring forth

works that accompany salvation. Your only hope is to trust Christ before it is too late to trust in Him!