

The Biblical Doctrine of Personal Apostasy

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Personal apostasy refers to the “falling away” of a person who at one time professed to believe the gospel. The key question concerning these individuals is whether they were ever genuinely saved. Since many passages tell us that apostasy inevitably results in eternal damnation, this question is of considerable importance. The doctrine of personal apostasy is a prominent teaching in the New Testament, discussed or alluded to in almost every book. In fact, an understanding of this doctrine is essential to the interpretation of many New Testament passages, as well as to an understanding of the New Testament’s general teaching regarding salvation. We will focus principally on four issues: 1) the definition of personal apostasy; 2) how a person apostatizes; 3) the general characteristics of apostasy; and 4) the risks personal apostasy poses to the local church.

Personal Apostasy Defined

Terminology

The word “apostasy” is derived indirectly from a Greek word that appears in 1 Timothy 4:1. The word “*aphistemi*” translated “fall away” (in the NASB) is the verb form of “*apostasia*” from which we transliterate the English term “apostasy.” The idea is to make a break or departure from something. The significance of a “departure” is, of course, determined by the context—*i.e.*, what one is departing from. In 2 Timothy 2:19 Paul uses this word to encourage Christians to depart from evil (the NASB says, “abstain”), whereas in Hebrews 3:12 the author uses it to warn people not to fall away from the living God. Obviously, departing from sin and departing from God are actions that would result in very different consequences. It is important to recognize that the occurrence of the word “*apostasia*,” (or other related terms) doesn’t necessarily indicate a passage is referring to personal apostasy as defined here. Likewise, apostasy is very frequently described in passages where the term “apostasy” isn’t used. How then are we to know when a passage is referring to personal apostasy? Actually, it isn’t difficult. The New Testament gives a very detailed description of personal apostasy, and it can be recognized by that description, even in the absence of particular terminology. Some of the key passages in the New Testament dealing with personal apostasy are: 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Hebrews 3; 6:4-8, 10:26-31, 12:14-29, 2 Peter 2, 1 John 1-3, and Jude 5-16.

Predisposing Concepts

What one believes about the permanence of salvation (*i.e.*, “eternal security”) is relevant to the interpretation of the New Testament passages dealing with personal apostasy. Arminians (modern semi-Pelagianists) believe it is possible for a saved person to lose their salvation. Accordingly, they define personal apostasy as a saved person departing from genuine faith in Christ, and consequently they tend to interpret the personal apostasy passages as examples of saved people being warned about the potential loss of salvation should they fail to persist in their faith. Those who accept the permanence of salvation (Calvinists, and moderate Calvinists) offer several explanations of the apostasy passages. One explanation is that they are warnings directed to believers not to live “carnally” (“fleshly,” or “worldly”). This explanation poses problems since virtually all of the extended passages picture the apostate as suffering eternal ruination (damnation), which would be inconsistent with the basic premise of eternal security. Another explanation is that these passages describe what might occur (hypothetically) if a truly saved person could forsake their faith in Christ. In other words, according to this view, a hypothetical outcome is projected for the sake of illustrating a theological truth. This explanation seems quite unrealistic, and doesn’t fit the historical circumstances described in some of the passages, nor does it explain the persistent warnings found throughout the New Testament.

The case will be made here that none of the above explanations is correct. Apostates are not people who were saved and lost their salvation, nor are they carnal Christians, nor is the warning of apostasy merely a hypothetical designed to illustrate the seriousness of sin. Apostates are individuals who at one time professed belief in the truth, but subsequently depart (apostatize) from their profession of belief. While these individuals may, for a time, appear to be Christians, they are not. In some cases they adopt the Christian lifestyle, and may even experience a measure of personal reformation, but they never come to true faith in Christ and to the point of regeneration and spiritual transformation. Thus, it is from their profession that they apostatize—not from genuine (regenerating) faith.

Since eternal security is foundational to the proper interpretation of the apostasy passages, it is important to establish that doctrine before proceeding. Actually, some of the apostasy passages are the very ones that are used to deny that the Bible teaches eternal security.

There are many ways to make the case for the permanence of salvation (eternal security). We could approach it from the standpoint of divine election (Rom. 9:1-24), or the various passages that refer to God's work of preservation, or sealing. But lest we get drawn into an intractable discussion about the interpretation of various proof texts (like John 10:28-30; Romans 8:1-39; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; Philippians 1:6, and 1 Corinthians. 5:5; 11:28-33), there is a much simpler way to establish the truth of the permanence of salvation. For this proof, we will use the following argument: In order for a saved person to be lost, either the saved person would have to be separated from God by something other than himself, or he would have to separate himself from God. (This argument has been stated in such a way that the law of non-contradiction applies, so there are only two possible options—a thing, and its negation {*i.e.*, if a person could be separated from God, that separation would either be due to the person himself—or something not himself}.) Since it is possible to conclusively prove that both of these options are impossible, we can prove beyond doubt that a saved person cannot lose his salvation. Let's see how this argument is developed and supported.

Paul says in Romans 8:31-39,

(8:31-39) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (32) He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (33) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; (34) who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (35) Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." (37) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (38) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, (39) nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

First of all, it is important to remember that this passage occurs in the book of Romans—the New Testament's most detailed explanation of personal salvation. In Romans 8:26-30 (the immediate context) Paul lays out the truth that once the salvation process is initiated, it will be completed without fail—there are no exceptions given. In verses 31-39 he proceeds to explain how this is possible; it is possible because there is nothing (*absolutely* nothing) that can separate the called and justified person from Christ. [The text says, "from *the love* of Christ" in verse 35, and "*the love* of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" in verse 39; however, both phases are euphemisms for "salvation," which has just been described in the immediate context.] In his litany of what can never separate a saved person from God, Paul struggles to include everything conceivable. He says nothing in the present or the future can separate us (that should include everything); he says that nothing natural or supernatural can separate us (that should include everything); he says nothing in life or death can separate us (that should include everything). What else is there? Paul didn't have the term "universal set" used in modern mathematics to describe absolutely everything, but that is clearly what he is describing. His statement on this matter is simply that there is

absolutely nothing that can separate the child of God from Christ. Some have suggested that this is nothing more than a statement that one cannot be separated from God's *love*—not salvation itself; but such an interpretation ignores the context, for here “the love of God” is expressed as salvation culminating in glorification (v. 30). It should be apparent that nothing (either in the present or future, in life or death, in the natural or the supernatural, external or internal—which would certainly include the believer himself—could ever separate the saved person from Christ. While some accept the fact that nothing external to the believer could separate him from Christ (and in so doing they acquiesce to the substance of this passage), they hold that a believer could choose to renounce his faith and forfeit his own salvation. However, that is clearly not possible according to this passage. Remember, Paul has established that there is *absolutely nothing* that can separate the believer from Christ, and that includes the believer himself. There are no exceptions, exclusions, or limitations in this passage, and the believer is clearly included in the list of things (“life, or death” {i.e., the continued living of one’s life cannot result in a person being separated from Christ}, “things present,” “thing to come,” and just in case he missed anything, Paul adds, “nor any other created thing” {i.e., other than all the things already mentioned in the list}). It is also possible to prove from 1John 2:18-19 that a saved person cannot depart (or apostatize) from the faith. John says,

(18) Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. (19) They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.

Here John explains the phenomena of those who came into the church, professed faith in Christ, and then defected (possibly back to their former religion, or on to a new religion). He is dealing with the very doctrine that is the focus of our study—the doctrine of personal apostasy. His explanation is simple: such people were never genuinely saved, for if they had been, they would not have left the faith. Thus, by John’s explicit statement he asserts that saved people cannot remove themselves from Christ. According to John, to deny the faith is only to manifest that one never possessed genuine faith. This is an amazingly significant statement, which as we have seen, is confirmed by Paul in Romans 8:31-39. Returning to the argument from Romans 8:31-39, we see then that both options (the saved person being separated from God by something outside of himself, and the saved person separating himself from God) are equally impossible. Thus, since a saved person cannot be separated from Christ, salvation, once initiated, is permanent. This should never be interpreted to imply that Christians are free to sin—God saves his children *from* sin—not *to* sin, and he can and will discipline those who need help understanding the difference.

Having established the permanence of salvation, we are now ready to look at some of the key passages describing, or warning against apostasy. Since we have already established that a saved person cannot lose their salvation, and since, as we will see, apostates are described as suffering the eternal condemnation of God, it should be clear that those who apostatize were never saved. [We should bear in mind, that not all unsaved people become apostates. Apostates are a subset of the unsaved. They are people who at one time make a profession of faith in Christ (not resulting in salvation), and who subsequently return to things more consistent with their unredeemed nature. Naturally, there are also unsaved individuals within the church that never outwardly apostatize, but continue to refuse the truth. Jude refers to these as “hidden reefs” within the church (Jude 12). Their outcomes are, however, the same.]

A General Description of Personal Apostasy

The description of an apostate given in the New Testament is of an individual who, while fully understanding the truth of the gospel, and having professed faith in Christ, ultimately falls away from (or “departs from”) their profession of faith. This happens because they were never genuinely converted. [We have to be careful not to confuse “the faith” (the gospel) with personal faith (a choice to yield to the demands of the gospel). Apostates defect from “the faith,” because they have no personal faith.]

Generally speaking, the world was not a friendly place prior to the influence of Christianity. Paganism could be very cruel, and the social effects of paganism were everywhere to be seen—from the exposure of unwanted infants and the elderly, to rampant moral degradation even under the guise of religious worship. Where Christianity penetrated this darkness, there were people who were attracted to the life of local churches and the concern Christians showed for one another; there were also those who saw the church as an institution to be exploited. Whatever the case, many people came into the fold of Christianity who had not genuinely yielded themselves to Christ resulting in regeneration and true conversion. (The gradual infiltration of the church by unbelievers was prophesied by Christ in the parables of Matthew 13.) Some of these eventually returned to their former religion, or went on to the next religion. This phenomenon was perplexing (and distressing) to the churches. As a result, there are numerous references and explanations, as well as warnings about apostasy throughout the New Testament. Unfortunately, the modern church has largely lost sight of this teaching, and the result has been confusion and incorrect interpretation of many New Testament passages—principally the passages discussed below. Lack of clarity about the nature of personal apostasy is also at the heart of much of the argumentation between Arminians and Calvinists.

1 Timothy 4:1-3

(4:1-3) But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, (2) by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, (3) men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

In this passage Paul describes an apostate as one who departs from “[the] faith” (v. 1). Some have mistakenly taken Paul’s statement to mean that these individuals were previously saved. However, this is a reference to a departure from the gospel itself, not from personal saving faith. We must not confuse “the faith” with personal faith in Christ; these are two distinct concepts (*cf.* Jude 3). “The faith” refers to the body of truth (inclusive of the gospel) that defines Christianity. “Personal faith” (*i.e.*, “saving faith”) is submission to the gospel—which is a portion of that truth (*cf.* 1 Pt. 1:22; 2:8; 3:1; 4:17). Of course, in order for someone to depart from the faith, they must at one time have professed to believe the faith. (How else could it be said that they depart from it?) In other words, an apostate is one who professes to believe the truth (*i.e.*, the defining truths of Christianity, including the gospel) for a time, but later turns from that profession. It is important to remember, however, that outward profession may, or may not, be the product of true (saving) faith. There is simply no way to tell from a profession if the faith professed is genuine; true faith can only be seen through a transformed life consistent with belief in the truth. The fact that Paul indicates it was from “the” faith that these departed, rather than from “faith” (*i.e.*, personal faith) lends no support to the contention that these individuals were previously saved.

2 Peter 2:1-22

(2:1-22) But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. (2) Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; (3) and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (4) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; (5) and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (6) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; (7) and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (8) (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), (9) then the Lord knows how to

rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, (10) and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, (11) whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. (12) But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, (13) suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong. They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, (14) having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children; (15) forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; (16) but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet. (17) These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. (18) For speaking out arrogant words of vanity they entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error, (19) promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. (20) For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. (21) For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. (22) It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

Peter describes the same type of person that Paul described in 1 Timothy 4:1-3. Notice the linkage: 1) In verse 15, he "forsakes" (relinquishes) the right way. 2) In verse 20, after escaping the defilements of the world by the knowledge (*epignosis*) of the Lord and Savior, he reverts back to those defilements. The question we have to answer is this: Is there any indication from this passage that the apostates described here are, or ever were saved? The answer is "No," and we can support this from three lines of evidence.

The first line of evidence is found in 2 Peter 2:20. Here Peter says, "the last state has become worse for them than the first." Verse 21 defines the two states to which verse 20 refers; the first state is "not to have known the way of righteousness." The second state is, "having known it, to turn away." Now if we took this statement to refer to saved people, that would put Peter in the position of saying that these people were better off before they were saved—obviously an absurdity, which is one reason this passage cannot be referring to saved people. No matter what kind of Christian one might be, it could never be correctly said that they were better off before they were saved. The Arminian view of this passage is that the people described were saved and then lost their salvation—in which case they certainly would be worse off (but not worse off than they were before they knew the gospel—only worse off than they were before they "lost" their salvation). But that's not what the passage actually says; the passage says that they are worse off than before they knew the gospel. The idea is that these individuals were better off before they turned away from the truth, because up to that point they could have yielded themselves and been saved, but now they have determined to reject the truth, and in so doing they have rendered themselves with no further recourse—since there is no other means of salvation than faith in Christ. If a person rejects the truth with full knowledge (i.e., the *epignosis*) of what he is doing, what hope is there? Such a person has understood the truth of the gospel and with sufficient knowledge has refused it.

The second line of evidence is found in verse 22. What does the proverb of "the dog returning to its vomit" mean? A dog returns to its vomit because that's a dog's nature. Why does a pig "wallow in the mud?" Because wallowing in the mud is consistent with the pig's nature. You can bath a pig, but that doesn't change the pig's nature; even a pig having had a bath is still a pig, and we shouldn't be surprised when it returns to the mud. This proverb simply illustrates the difference between reformation and transformation. An apostate turns away from the faith because he or she was never transformed through

personal faith in the truth, even though they may have experienced a measure of personal reformation for a period of time. (Personal reformation may involve both attitudes and actions—soul and body—but does not originate from a renewed spirit, as does transformation.) When such a one departs from the faith and denies the Savior, they are simply doing what is in accordance with their untransformed nature. They may have appeared to be a saved person (from what could be detected externally), but in reality their nature was never changed, and eventually some of them overtly return to their old ways (i.e., they apostatize, *cf.* Luke 11:24-28), while others covertly remain as “hidden reefs” within the local church (Jude 12).

The third line of evidence that this passage is describing apostasy involves the apostate’s destiny. Verse 1 says that apostates will be “destroyed” (Gr. *apollumi*, which means, “to destroy utterly”—a total and final destruction). This is the same term that is translated “perish” in John 3:16; there the ones perishing are set in bold contrast to the saved. In Matthew 15:24 *apollumi* is translated “lost.” The idea is that to be “lost” indicates a future of eternal destruction in Hell. In 2 Peter 2:9, Peter indicates that these individuals will be kept under punishment “for the day of judgment.”¹ In 2:17 Peter says, “the black darkness has been reserved” for apostates. This phrase, composed of six Greek words, is repeated in only one other place in the New Testament—Jude 13. A comparison of Jude 5-13 clearly establishes that Jude was speaking in reference to the same people Peter had in mind (apostates). Note that Jude adds the word “forever” in the phrase. Doubtless, this is an eternal judgment. Thus, we see that apostates, as described in this passage, are lost and there is no indication they were ever saved.

Hebrews 3:1-14

(3:1-11) Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; (2) He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. (3) For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. (4) For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. (5) Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; (6) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, (8) DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, (9) WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED ME BY TESTING ME, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. (10) THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’; (11) AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’”

There are three major views on the meaning of this and the other related passages in Hebrews (6:4-14; 10:26-31; 12:14-29). The first view is that these passages are warnings to Christians not to live carnally.² The second view (an Arminian view) is that these passages are a warning to Christians not to apostatize and thus forfeit their salvation. I will present the case that the correct view is that these passages are a warning to people in the church about the danger of failing to take possession of salvation (*i.e.*, the failure to exercise saving faith), thus falling beyond hope into apostasy. When we come to Hebrews 6:4-8, we will note an additional view (the hypothetical view) with respect to that passage.

The major problem we must deal with in this passage is determining who is being addressed. In verse 1 the address is clearly to “holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling” and in verse 6 to the house of God (in so many words). Again, in verse 12 they are referred to as “brethren.” There can be no doubt that these are all references to a group of saved people. That’s the obvious point. Now, let’s look at the not-so-obvious point: Each time the readers are addressed as “brethren,” or some other term indicative of genuine faith (*cf.* vv. 1-6a & 12), the address is qualified. The identification as saved people established in verses 1-6a is qualified in verse 6b (where “if” is the third class conditional—“*ean*” [the subjunctive mood—implying that the condition is uncertain]; in other words, they may or may not actually be of God’s house.)³ What the writer is saying is this: You are what I have called you (in verses 1-6a), *assuming* (*i.e.*, “if”) you hold fast (v. 6b). What is the opposite of holding fast? Verse 12 defines it

as “falling away” (*apostasia*). Also, the identification as saved people established in verse 12 is qualified in verse 14. (Again, “if” is the third class conditional—subjunctive mood, as before.) In other words, the author addresses his audience according to their profession of faith, since he does not know their hearts, but he does so with clear qualification. His form of address contains the cordial assumption that they are what they claim to be (true believers in Christ), though he clearly has concerns that some within the church may eventually be manifested as apostates. (This is probably a wise assumption to make about any church, past or present.) There is a parallel to this form of address in Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church. Three times in 2 Corinthians Paul refers to his readers as “brethren,” twice as “beloved” and in the first verse he addresses the letter to “saints;” but in 13:5 he warns that some of them might not be saved! Clearly his appellations were conditioned upon true faith in Christ. Even though Paul addressed the readers as “saints” and “brethren,” he knew the likelihood that in any church there are some who, though they fully understand the gospel, have yet to act on it (*i.e.*, to take possession of salvation by faith). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews does the same thing; he writes to a local congregation warning them about the possibility of apostasy among some within the congregation, even though he is convinced that most of them are saved (*cf.* 6:9). After all, how else could such a letter have been addressed? We could hardly expect him to have said: “To the saints and potential apostates” —such would have been patently offensive, and does not fit with the tone of the letter. While the passage is addressed to those professing faith in Christ, it is a warning of the danger of failing to take possession of salvation through faith in Christ.

The presence of these conditions is clear evidence that the author was concerned about the salvation of some in the local church. His assertion is that those who are truly saved are those who “hold fast the beginning...firm until the end,” (*i.e.*, they are not of those who “fall away”).⁴ This agrees with the message of 1 John 2:18-19. Therefore, we should understand the “rest” referred to in 3:15-4:13 as illustrating (analogically) salvation through faith. Those who have placed their faith in Christ have entered that rest—all who have not are strongly exhorted to do so. Again, we have seen that there is no indication from this passage that a saved person can be lost. The message here is this: It is those who hold fast to the end that are truly saved. It’s simply the nature of true faith to be “faithful.” “Faith” that proves unfaithful was never true faith.

Hebrews 6:4-12

(6:4-12) For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (7) For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; (8) but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. (9) But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. (10) For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. (11) And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, (12) so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The three basic interpretations of the Hebrews apostasy passages were given above; however, we need to mention one additional interpretation sometimes given to 6:4-12, which we will denote as the “hypothetical interpretation.” It asserts that this passage describes what would happen “if” a saved person could apostatize (which proponents view to be impossible); thus, according to this view we have a hypothetical postulated simply to make a point—a theological argument from an extreme case. Although this interpretation is certainly incorrect, it has a logical appeal in that it holds that saved people can’t apostatize since that would (hypothetically) lead to the loss of their salvation, which of course cannot happen (owing to the presumption of eternal security). Thus, this interpretation argues against a saved

person being able to apostatize, but fails to recognize that apostasy is an actual state for some—not just a hypothetical argument.

The fact that this passage is addressed to a believing audience has been a stumbling block to some who fail to see that the key is being able to distinguish between “who is being address” (a mixed group that is presumptively Christian) and “who is being referred to.” Whoever they are, they are described by five statements. 1) They have been “enlightened.” 2) They have “tasted” of the heavenly gift. 3) They have been made “partakers” of the Holy Spirit. 4) They have “tasted” the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. 5) They have “fallen away.” How do we know that apostasy is in view here? First, because of the description. The individual described is one who has “fallen away.” The word *parapipto* is a strong term; it means, “to defect.”⁵ The nature and the magnitude of this defection can be seen in the last half of verse 6, “...since they are re-crucifying the Son of God for themselves and putting Him (Christ) to public ridicule” [my translation]. Note the following. We are told that they “re-crucify” the Son of God (*i.e.*, they display in their own hearts and minds the same hatred, hostility, and rejection toward Christ as did those who crucified him. This rejection is both personal and public; they re-crucify Him “to” (or “for”) themselves (middle voice) and put Him to “open shame” (ridicule). This is clearly the same description given of apostasy elsewhere (*cf.* 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pt. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:18-19.) While some imply that carnality in the life of a believer is figuratively a re-crucifixion of Christ, such a thought is completely foreign to the book of Hebrews (*cf.* Heb. 10:10-14). Re-crucifixion of Christ in the heart and mind of an individual can only be taken as rejection of His messiahship; it is a “falling away” which, as we have seen from Hebrews chapter 3, disqualifies one from the title of “brethren,” and being “partakers of a heavenly calling.” The second reason we know this passage is describing apostasy is because of the nature of the examples given. In verses 7 and 8 the two types of ground represent two types of people. There are those that respond with “fruit” and those that respond with “thorns and thistles” (*cf.* Jesus’ parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23). The ground described in verse 8 is clearly representative of the person described in verse 6 who “falls away.” Notice the description of this ground: “... it is rejected and a curse is at hand (impending), of which the end is unto burning” [my translation]. The word “curse” is *katara*, which means “condemnation.” Of course, it would be impossible for a saved person to suffer the condemnation of God.⁶ Otherwise, what is he, or she saved from, if not condemnation? Some find what they suppose to be a loophole in the word “nigh” (KJV) or “close” (NASB). The argument is that this can describe saved people because it does not say that they are cursed—only that they are “close” to being cursed. But, if as has been established, a saved person cannot be lost, how close can one get to something that is absolutely impossible? It is as ridiculous to think that a saved person could be close to condemnation as it is to think that such a one could be condemned. The word translated “close” is *eggus* (pronounced “engus”). Its usage here has the sense of that which is “impending” (*cf.* 2 Pt. 2:3b). The idea is that the judgment of the apostate has not been carried out, but it will be carried out when he faces the Lord whom he has persistently denied with full knowledge. The third reason for believing that the person described in Hebrews 6:4-12 is an apostate is that apostasy is indicated by way of contrast with true faith. Verse 9 says, “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, even taking possession of salvation, even though we are speaking in this way” [my translation]. The NASB reads, “...things that accompany salvation.” The word “accompany” (or to “take possession of”) is *echomena*, which in the middle voice, as here, means, “to seize” or “to possess for one’s self.”⁷ Notice that the writer distinguishes his readers, in general, from those people he has just described in particular; they (the believers) have taken possession of salvation, clearly implying that those described earlier (vv. 4-8) had not. There are two responses to the gospel. One is to take possession of salvation; the other is to actively turn away from it, or passively ignore it. The people described in verses 4-8 are those who having received (*i.e.*, heard) the gospel, and perhaps at some superficial level having embraced it, have ultimately turned away.

The question we need to answer is this: Is there any indication that these who apostatized were ever true believers? The answer, as before, is “No.” However, the descriptive clauses in this passage present us with more problems than the previous passages because they contain some words or phrases that many have mistakenly come to associate only with true belief.

The first clause occurs in verse 4, and describes the subjects as “...those who were once enlightened.” The word “enlightened” is *photizo*, and its use here is figurative. The idea is of a person coming to understand truth. The question is: Does enlightenment come before or after saving faith? The answer is, “Both.” One certainly comes to understand some things only after coming to faith in Christ, but they must understand the gospel before they can even make the decision to come. So, enlightenment both precedes and follows saving faith. The point with respect to the passage at hand is whether this reference to the subjects having been previously “enlightened” indicates faith on their part. Since one can be enlightened without responding in faith, we must conclude that there is nothing in this description that indicates these individuals possessed saving faith. (We should also note from John 1:6-13 that although every man is “enlightened” at some time, not all are saved.)

The second clause (also in verse 4) describes the subjects as ones who “...have tasted of the heavenly gift.” While there is some uncertainty as to what “the heavenly gift” refers, the key to unraveling this statement lies in the word “tasted.”⁸ Obviously this is a metaphorical use of the word, since the heavenly gift is not something that could be literally (physically) tasted. The word *geuomai*, when used metaphorically, means “to perceive”—as in “a taste of reality”. It is not necessary for a person to be saved to perceive the gift of God. The reason is simple: perceiving salvation through the illuminating and convicting work of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the *epignosis* (sure knowledge) of the truth, which one must possess before they can come to Christ. When a person comes to the sure knowledge of the truth, they have perceived (*i.e.*, metaphorically “tasted”) the gift of salvation, even if they eventually reject it.⁹

The third clause also occurs in verse 4, and describes the subjects as having been made “partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Unlike the previous clause, there is no reason to regard this as a metaphor. There is general agreement that no one could be saved unless they first become a recipient of the work of the Holy Spirit. That work includes illumination, conviction, and calling. Actually, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, there would be no call to refuse. Because we normally regard “partaking” as active (*i.e.*, the result of active volitional choice on the part of the subject), it is easy to misunderstand what is being said in this clause. No such choice is indicated here, since “partake” is in the passive voice. In other words, these are not individuals that chose to partake (by an act of faith), but people who were only passive recipients of the illumination, conviction, and general calling of the Spirit. To put it another way, we could say that they were made partakers of the Spirit in the same way that we are made partakers of the judicial system when we receive a speeding ticket.

The fourth descriptive clause is in verse 5 and pictures the subjects as those who “have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.” Again we have the word “tasted” (*geuomai*), and as before it is here used metaphorically (since one can’t literally taste the Bible or future realities). These individuals are said to have perceived the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come (possibly a reference to the ministry of the Spirit in signs and wonders as manifested in the early churches). But this could be said of anyone within the church, whether saved or lost, so there is no implication that these individuals were saved.

The fifth descriptive clause occurs in verse 6 and pictures the subjects as having received all of the aforementioned benefits “and then have fallen away.” The question is, “What did they fall away from?” The answer is that they fell away from what they had—the opportunity (by virtue of knowledge and conviction) to respond to the gospel. Here we encounter a hard concept, hard in the sense that it is not pleasant to consider—but there comes a time in the life of every person who refuses the gospel when that refusal becomes permanent, by his or her own choice. [I have a little story that may help to illustrate this. When I was in elementary school, I liked to play with magnets. One of the things I enjoyed doing with magnets was to put them on a desk several inches apart and lightly tap them closer together. The object was to see how close I could get them without having them suddenly fly together. I have to confess to having missed out on some foundational academics because of this, but I did learn a very simple lesson in physics (quite unintentionally). That lesson is simply this: If you have two magnets one inch apart, and they don’t fly together, they aren’t going to fly together if you move them further apart. (Many years later

I learned that this was simply a function of the Inverse Square Law, which seems to be ubiquitous in classical physics.) The spiritual application is simply this: There is a time in the life of every person when they are at the closest point they will ever be to coming to Christ—maximum light, conviction, persuasion, etc. If they refuse at that point (and they will never be closer), how will they ever be saved? The sad truth taught in this passage is that they won't, and since a person never knows if he or she is at their spiritual "perigee" (closest point), refusing to say "Yes" at any opportunity could potentially render them beyond hope. The writer of Hebrews is delivering a poignant warning to those within the church who had come out of the world and into the church, but who had failed, as of yet, to enter into salvation, hence the strong parallel to Israel's wandering in the wilderness described in Hebrews 3:7-4:11.] There is nothing in this last clause that indicates that these individuals were at one time true believers. Again, this passage is a description of an individual who falls beyond hope after hearing the gospel by persistent failure to respond in faith.

Hebrews 10:26—31

(10:26-31) For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. (28) Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. (29) 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? (30) For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE." (31) It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We need to preface our examination of this text with a brief orientation. Verse 26 begins with the word "for." When we examine verses 26-31, which describes the path to apostasy, what we find is that this section stands in contrast to verses 19-25, which describes true belief. Note also the parallel between 10:19-25 and 3:1-6, and between 10:19-25 and 3:12-14. What we have in this book is a recurring warning against apostasy.

We are able to discern from this passage six reasons why the people described in this section (vv. 26-31) are apostates. The first reason is given in verse 26 where the text says, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." We know from our previous study of 2 Peter 2 that "the knowledge of the truth" refers to an understanding of the gospel (Incidentally, this identification is consistent throughout Peter's writings; see, 1 Peter 1:22.) So, we recognize here that we have a person who "sins willfully" (*i.e.*, makes a conscious choice of sin over Christ) after receiving the sure knowledge of the gospel (the *epignosis*). What we must understand is the nature of this state. (I refer to this as a "state" because the word "sinning" in the original is a present participle and indicates a continuing condition.) The word "willful" is *ekousios*, which means "voluntary." In other words, the description is of a person who has abandoned himself, or herself, to a state of sin. Obviously, in light of 1 John 3:6-10 this cannot describe a Christian who is merely struggling with sin. This is the description of a person who has voluntarily abandoned himself to sin, and does not know Christ—regardless of what he might claim. (Virtually the whole Book of 1 John is devoted to this theme.) The second reason why this passage must be describing apostasy is found in verse 26b, which reads, "...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The word *apoleipetai*, translated "remains," means "to be left." We could say, "...there is left no sacrifice for sins." The reason why there is no sacrifice for sin is because the person described in this passage has, with full knowledge, rejected the only sufficient sacrifice for sin—which is Christ. The third reason why this passage must be describing apostasy is found in verse 26. Here we are told what this person *doesn't* have—a sacrifice for sins. In verse 27 we are told what he *does* have—the prospect of a terrifying future. Note this very important fact given in verse 27: These people are classed as "adversaries" of God. They are adversaries whom God is going to judge with a consuming fire. The NIV reads: "but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." The fourth reason why this passage must be describing apostasy is found

in verse 29. Here we encounter three parallel statements. They all indicate a rejection of the gospel, but they express it in different words. The first statement says that they have “trampled under foot the Son of God.” *Katapateo*, which is translated “trample” means to “spurn” (when used figuratively, as here). The idea is an outright rejection of Christ. In other words, the person in view considers the Son of God as “worthless”—like dirt beneath his feet. The second statement says that he “regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” “Unclean” (*koinos*) means “common.” The idea is that this person has no appreciation for the sanctity and efficacy of Christ’s death—it evokes no positive response from this individual. The third statement says they have “insulted the Spirit of grace” The reference is to the Holy Spirit. Our word “insult” doesn’t carry the depth of force that *enubrizo* indicates. The idea is an arrogant, insolent, scornful, even blasphemous disregard of the Spirit’s work in calling men to salvation. In these three statements, we have three pictures of rejection of the gospel. The fifth reason why this passage must be describing apostasy is seen in verses 30-31. *Ekdikesis*, translated “vengeance,” refers to retributive justice. The idea is “punishment” in the strictest sense of the word.¹⁰ The sixth reason why this passage must be describing apostasy is in verse 39, where the author reflects back on what he has said in verses 19-38. Two words in the first part of this verse are key to understanding who and what is being described here. “Shrink back” (*hupostoles*) means, “to turn back;” the idea is equivalent to *apostasia* (“to fall away”), “Destruction” (*apoleia*) means “perdition.” Perdition is by definition the absence of salvation. Also, note the contrast presented in verse 39b. There can be no doubt that verse 39 identifies the people described in verses 26-31 as apostates.

As before, the question is: Is there anything in the description that would lead us to believe that these individuals were previously saved? Arminians point out that there are a few reasons for thinking that this is the case. Let’s look at those reasons. First, since the writer includes himself in the group he refers to by the pronoun “we” (v. 26), some assume that he must be referring to saved people. The answer to this is that the verse itself defines who is included within the scope of this pronoun—it is everyone who has “received the knowledge of the truth,” which encompasses both those who have responded positively (unto salvation) and those who have responded negatively (remaining unsaved). There is simply no grammatical or contextual reason for restricting this pronoun to refer only to saved people.¹¹ The second reason offered is that in verse 26 the subjects are said to have “received the knowledge of the truth.” This sounds like something that would describe a saved person. However, as we have noted above, one must receive the knowledge of the truth in order to make a decision to come to Christ; thus such knowledge precedes salvation and in no way indicates that these people ever possessed saving faith. Peter, in 2 Peter 2:20 describes people who receive the knowledge of the Lord and Savior but remain unsaved. We should not confuse “receiving the knowledge of the Lord” with “receiving the Lord.” These are two distinct ideas. Receiving the knowledge of the Lord does not imply any decision on the part of the recipient. All that is indicated in this passage is that these individuals came to understand the truth of the gospel; it certainly indicates nothing in the way of a positive response. The third reason offered is based on verse 29. The people in question are said to have been “sanctified” by the blood of the covenant (*i.e.*, by Christ’s blood), which some take as an indication that the writer is referring to believers. The answer to this objection is somewhat more involved than the others, for this reason: When we hear the word “sanctify” (*hagiazō*) we tend to associate it with the sanctification in regard to salvation. However, *hagiazō* is capable of a much broader application than that. For example, in 1Corinthians 7:14 it is specifically applied to the unsaved spouses of believers. *Hagiazō* carries the idea of placing something into a privileged position. It might be a position of grace, or of righteousness, or of consecration, or of opportunity. So, in what sense is it appropriate to refer to a lost person as “sanctified” by the blood of Christ? The answer is that the death of Christ sanctifies every man in the sense that it puts every man into a position of opportunity to be saved (*i.e.*, it makes them “savable”).¹² This clause has probably been the greatest sticking-point for many, but it is important to recognize that this is due to reading our very narrow concept of sanctification into this passage, rather than recognizing the broad usage of this term. Just as there is a special sense in which only true believers are “sanctified” (with respect to salvation), so there is another sense in which all men, especially those that are exposed to the gospel, are “sanctified.”

As we have seen, there is nothing in this passage that indicates these apostates were once saved. Based on the description given, they are simply individuals who having come to understand the gospel simply said “No” (or “Maybe,” which is the same thing), instead of “Yes.” To illustrate, say you had a son, and your son saw a neighbor about to be hit by a truck and pushed your neighbor out of the way only to be crushed to death himself by the truck. Now let’s say that your neighbor never acknowledged the sacrifice your son made. In fact, let’s say that your neighbor was just downright unthankful and even hostile to you and your family. Get the picture? This passage is telling us that God sent His Son into the world to die for sinners so they wouldn’t have to spend eternity in Hell, but some, after coming to understand what God did for them (the *epignosis*), either reject the precious gift outright, or think so little of it that they just never get around to acting on it, until finally they no longer think about it anymore. According to the writer of Hebrews, such people have only themselves to blame for eventually crossing over the line into hopelessness and the fearful prospect of eternity in Hell. The underlying message of this passage is this: Today is the day of salvation—don’t put it off. Whatever a person may think, they are without excuse and without remedy if they fail to respond to the gospel (*cf.* Heb. 3:7-19).

Hebrews 12:14-29

(12:14-24) Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (15) See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (16) that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. (17) For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (18) For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, (19) and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. (20) For they could not bear the command, “IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED.” (21) And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, “I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling.” (22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, (23) to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

In these sixteen verses there are five statements that indicate this passage is a warning against apostasy. The first is in verse 14b. What the writer is saying is simply this: Pursue salvation; don’t stop short only to be lost.¹³ There are two contrasting responses to the gospel. One response is to take possession of salvation (*cf.* Heb. 6:9, the NASB rendering, “accompany” is *echomena*—middle voice, which means, “to possess for one’s self”). The other response is to turn away from salvation. Here the writer is clearly concerned that some may not press forward (pursue) and obtain (by faith) that sanctification (salvation) without which they are lost. The second statement is in verse 15a. This statement might be somewhat difficult to interpret, if not for the context of verses 14-16. However, given the context, it is apparent that coming “short of the grace of God” means failure to enter into salvation. The third statement is in verse 16. Here “godless” (*bebelos*) means “irreligious.”¹⁴ The writer is clearly describing apostasy. Even the illustration of Esau is of one who had something within reach, but turned from it. [This should not be construed to imply that Esau was not “saved.” He is only used here in an analogical sense of one who had something within his reach, but failed to take possession—in essence despising the gift.] The fourth statement occurs in verse 25a, and is an admonition about refusing Him who warns from heaven. *Paraitesesthe* (translated, “refuse”) indicates a decisive rejection of God’s warning of judgment. The fifth statement, which is found in verse 25b, describes those who “turn away from” God.¹⁵ Unlike some of the other apostasy passages in Hebrews, this one contains no statements which might easily be misconstrued to refer to true believers. It is simply a summary statement of the theme that runs through the entire book. It is a sobering message: Don’t trade your opportunity for a bowl of soup or you’ll be very, sorry!

1 John 1:1-3:12

(1:1-4) What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—(2) and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—(3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (4) These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.

Virtually the entire Book of 1 John comprises an extended contrast of vain profession versus true faith, and demonstrates that disingenuous faith sometimes manifests its true nature in open defection (apostasy). For the sake of brevity we will focus primarily on the first three chapters of the book. In these chapters John discussed the problem of those within the local church who claimed to know God, but their lives evidenced a different reality. While the opening verses seem to indicate that the church to which this letter was addressed had become infected with Gnosticism (an early heresy that denied any linkage between God [Spirit] and flesh, and thus denied the incarnation), it is uncertain if full-blown Gnosticism was present in the church at this early date. In any case, it hardly matters in the present connection. We know that regardless of whether these individuals were connected with Gnostic belief or not, they are clearly identified as those who deny that God came in the flesh (*cf.* 4:2); they professed to be in right relation to God but were characterized by corrupt living (1:5; 3:4-10), denial of sin (1:8-10), disobedience to the commands of God (2:3-4), hatred—or at least a lack of love—toward the brethren (2:9-11; 3:11-18; 4:20), love of the world (2:15-17), in some cases open defection (2:18-19), denial that Jesus was the Messiah (2:22-23; 3:14-15), and denial of the hypostatic (personal) union of the divine and human natures of Christ (4:1-6). John makes the point early on that such individuals are excluded from the fellowship of God. He makes this point by way of contrast, stating that it is those who “walk in the light” (the present continual action indicates a general lifestyle—not the total absence of sin). It is those who “walk in the light”—not those who pretend but are filled with sin, hatred, and denial—that have fellowship with God.

It is a tragedy that the concept of “fellowship” is almost universally misconstrued today. Perhaps the most prevalent view of fellowship is that Christians who obey God and “walk in the light” are in fellowship with God, and those Christians who sin and do not confess their sins are “out of fellowship;” hence, the notion that confession “restores” broken fellowship. Such a view is completely at odds with this book. John clearly contrasts two kinds of people: the children of God (true believers, whose life is characterized by walking in light), and children of the Devil (whose lives are characterized by walking in darkness and denying the faith), *cf.* 3:10. True believers have fellowship with God; everyone else is in darkness. This doesn’t mean that believers don’t sin—they do. But when they sin, truly saved people confess their sin and move forward. In fact, verse 7 clearly demonstrates that sin does not interrupt a believer’s fellowship with God. In this verse John says “...but if we walk in the light (*peripatomen*—present continual action) as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship (*koinonian*—present continual action) with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (*kathapizei*—present continual action).” Notice that these three actions occur simultaneously: walking in the light, having fellowship, and being cleansed from all sin. He doesn’t say that if we walk in the light, but we fall into sin and lose our fellowship, that when we confess our sin fellowship will be restored and we’ll return to the light. He says this: If we are walking in the light (*i.e.*, we are God’s children), we are (at the very same time as we walk in the light) experiencing fellowship with God, and being cleansed from all sin. It should be obvious that John is not teaching that sin breaks fellowship, or that confession restores it. (This is not intended to minimize the importance of confession, which is a necessary component in experiential sanctification.) The fact is that Christians can no more lose their fellowship with God than they can lose their salvation. While this discussion may seem to be unrelated to the topic at hand, it is important to understand the subject with which John is dealing. According to John, there are two basic categories of people associated with the church: those who claim to be in right relation to God—and are, and those who claim to be in right relation to God—and aren’t. (There are certainly other subgroups, for example, “carnal Christians,” but they don’t come into view here.) Those who claim to be in right relation to God, but who do not know Him, are the same people we have seen from the previous texts that ultimately (if

they persist in their unbelief) fall beyond hope (*cf.* 2:18-19). For the remainder of our survey we will proceed in the same manner as with the other passages—to demonstrate that the individuals described here, who are set in contrast to those who “walk in the light,” are unsaved, and that they conform to the description of apostasy.

(1:5-2:2) This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. (6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (7) but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (2:1) My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (2) and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

John’s argument proceeds from the nature of God. God is light, without the slightest hint of darkness (v. 5), so God’s children, who are in Him, are children of light and walk in the light (vv. 6-7). This does not mean that they are completely without sin, for as verse seven clearly says, their lives are characterized by three activities all occurring continuously, *i.e.*, they walk in the light, they have fellowship with God (who is the light) and with their brethren (who also dwell in the light with them), and as they walk in the light they are being continually cleansed of all of their sin—not the sin of their past, but the sin of their present, committed while they are walking in the light. This is, of course, a very verbose statement, but John wanted to be certain his readers understood what he meant. Stated succinctly, this is what John said: If a person knows God, his life may not be perfect (and God has made provision for that, *cf.* 2:1-2) but one thing is certain, his life will reflect that he is a child of light rather than darkness. In essence, he said that it is possible to see the evidence of true faith from the outside. This is an important truth that has been largely obscured in modern Christianity. Why did John make such a statement? Because the church was experiencing the destructive effects of those within that claimed to be right with God (*i.e.*, in the light) who were not what they professed to be. By way of illustration, I once saw a television program on the building of a large bridge. This bridge was to be held up principally by one massive pylon in the middle, with huge cables stretching from this center pylon. As they poured the concrete for the pylon the engineers tested each load of concrete to be sure it was properly formulated and would stand up under the load. Unfortunately, one load of bad concrete was only discovered after it had been poured. When they began to chip it away, some large chunks of this material fell into the water below, where it could be seen floating! Obviously, what had initially passed for concrete was not what it had appeared to be when it was poured. Would it have mattered if they had just left it there? Of course it would have mattered; and the presence of false religion in the church is just as destructive. Just as the engineers tested the concrete upon which the bridge would rest, so John gives the test of true faith, upon which the weight of the Church rests (*cf.* Matt. 16:13-18).¹⁶ The test of true faith is conversion—the outward manifestation of inner transformation.

Apparently the particular form of unbelief that John was confronting had the characteristic of denying sin. This makes a strong case that it might have been an early form of Gnosticism, since that was a feature that is known to have been associated with Gnostic beliefs. [Since Gnostics denied any metaphysical connection between spirit and flesh, some Gnostics believed that the deeds of the flesh could not contaminate the spirit. Thus, they denied that they had sin.] John’s retort is clear and direct: If anyone says he has no sin, he is deceiving himself (v. 8), and calling God a liar, since God has declared all men to be sinners (Ps. 53:1-3). Confession of sin—that is, coming to grips with what we are—is one of the core characteristics of true faith, it’s called “repentance” and it’s one of the reasons many people refuse to come, because they cannot bring themselves to admit what they are. Repentance isn’t just something one does in order to obtain salvation, it is an integral part of faith (the turning from sin in order to turn to God for help), and it doesn’t cease after a person is initially saved, it continues to be a part of

faith as one progresses through the Christian life. The person who doesn't manifest repentance only evidences that true faith is not present.

(2:3) By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; (5) but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: (6) the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (7) Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. (8) On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. (9) The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. (10) The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. (11) But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Again, John emphasizes that the reality of true conversion (knowing God) will manifest itself not only in the inner life of the believer, but in the outer life as well. James also deals with this subject (Jam. 2:14-26), but John takes it a step further; he not only asserts that the true knowledge of God is evidenced by obedience (vv. 3,5,6) and love of the brethren (vv. 7-11), but he states categorically that where there is a lack of these, as a general characterization, the claim to know God is invalidated—such people live in the darkness, not in the light, and thus do not know God.

(2:12-18) I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. (13) I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. (14) I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (15) Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (18) Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

Notice how John continues his contrast of true belief and false profession. In verses 12-14 he reasserts the position of the truly converted: their sins are forgiven (v. 12), they know God (vv. 13-14), they have overcome the Evil One ("overcome" = *nenikekate*—perfect active, *i.e.*, they now stand as victors based on the triumph of their exercise of faith in Christ when they first believed in Him) *cf.* vv. 13-14, they are strong spiritually (v. 14), and the Word of God abides (continually) in them (v. 14). The love of the world is inconsistent with Christian faith. (John is not referring to the people of the world, but to "worldliness," *i.e.*, the values of the world. Anyone who loves the world does not love the Father (v. 15), because the character of the world (that is, fleshly lust, material lust, and pride) do not come from the Father; they are the product of the darkness that is in the world. The world is destined to perish, but not so the one who does the will of the Father (*i.e.*, the one who truly knows God).

(2:19-27) They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (20) But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you all know. (21) I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. (22) Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. (23) Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. (24) As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you,

you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (25) This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. (26) These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (27) As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.

Having laid the foundational truth that there are two kinds of people within the church (those who truly know God, and those who merely profess to know Him), he now embarks upon his explanation of the apostasy of individuals within the local congregation. He reminds the believers that they are living in the last hour (*i.e.*, the “last time”—the *eschaton*, which from the Old Testament perspective began with the advent of the Messiah). They had been taught that in the *eschaton* false Christs (antichrists) would come. [Jesus is the source of this information. It originates from his Olivet Discourse and is recorded in Matthew 24:24. Whether these believers had access to Matthew’s gospel is unknown, but they certainly had access to apostolic teaching.] In verse 19, which is undoubtedly one of the most important explanatory passages in the New Testament, John makes the profound assertion that those who have departed (implying a complete departure from the faith) have done so because they were never “of us” (*i.e.*, of the children who dwell in light—that is, those who know God). In light of the reiteration in the second half of the verse, it is quite impossible to misunderstand his meaning. He says that we know they were not of us because (*ei gar*, “for if”—giving the reason) “if” they had been of us they would have remained with us (*i.e.*, they would not have apostatized). John states that their departure happened for a purpose (*all’ hina*—“*hina*” being a purposive particle), “in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us—the sense is that not everyone who professes to be right with God is truly saved. This verse establishes two critical points with respect to the theme of the book, and New Testament soteriology: 1) the theme of this book is the contrast of true belief, with mere profession leading to apostasy; and 2) it establishes the doctrine of the permanence of salvation, since it clearly states that anyone who departs from the faith was never genuinely saved. (See the previous discussion on the permanence of salvation.)

John didn’t want his letter to sound as if the believers couldn’t have figured this out for themselves (vv. 20-21). After all, they did have the Holy Spirit (v. 20). We may assume that John was prompted by the Spirit to write these things as a matter of record for the Church at large. In verse 22 John returns to his discourse reiterating that the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah—God’s Son in the flesh) speaks in the spirit of antichrist—which denies both Father and Son (v. 22). The denial of Christ is also a denial of the Father (v. 23), which answers the question some have posed, “Is it possible that some Jews who rejected Christ as Messiah were sincere worshipers of God?” Obviously, in light of John’s statement there can be no doubt that those who rejected Jesus, as the Christ, could not have been sincere worshipers of the Father.

(2:28-3:12) Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. (29) If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. (3:1) See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (4) Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. (5) You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. (6) No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. (7) Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; (8) the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (9) No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (10) By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (11) For this is the message which you have heard

from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

John continues his contrast with the admonition to abide in Christ, but adds an additional motivation: that we might have confidence and not shrink away from Him (as will those who dwell in darkness) at His coming (v. 28). Again, he reinforces his previous statements to the effect that it is those who practice righteousness that are born of God ("practice" = *poion*, present active participle, signifying to practice as an ongoing manner of living). The one who practices sin (again, *poion* as before) also practices lawlessness, because sin *is* lawlessness. The ones who walk in darkness not only sin, they blatantly disobey God's explicit commands (v. 4). Christ didn't come to save men so that they would be free to sin, but so they could be free from sin (v. 5). He repeats what he has said before: "No one who abides in Him sins"—not a reference to an individual sin, everyone sins, but to the giving of one's self to live in sin. He admonishes the brethren not to be deceived. True belief manifests itself in righteousness (v. 7). Where righteousness is absent, it is to be assumed that saving faith is also absent, and the subject is a child of the Devil (v. 8). John says that the Devil has sinned from the beginning and Christ came to destroy the works of the Devil (v. 8); so by implication, the one who sins is not in Christ. Notice the strong dichotomy. John leaves no room for misunderstanding. He isn't merely contrasting "spiritual believers" with "carnal believers." He is contrasting saved and lost. Not only does the one who is born of God not practice sin, he cannot, because God's seed (a reference to the indwelling Holy Spirit) abides in him. As if he hadn't stated this truth robustly enough already, John now connects all the dots so that no one has any reason to misunderstand what he is saying. He vigorously maintains that it is possible to tell who are children of God and who are children of the Devil by their lifestyles (v. 10). In an age of "private religion" this is not a popular text, and if strictly applied—which it should be—we would have to confess that there are probably far fewer saved people than the number professing faith would suggest.

There are other passages in this book where we see the same contrast between the truly saved and the professing but unsaved (3:14-15; 4:1-6, 7-10, 11-21; 5:1-12). Nevertheless, the point is sufficiently made: There are two kinds of people within the professing church: those that know God, and those who merely profess to know him but are unsaved. It is the latter group from which apostates ultimately arise.

How Does One Become an Apostate?

It would be helpful if we could get a clear picture of what is involved in a person coming to faith in Christ. Probably the best and most succinct statement is that faith is simply the exercising of positive volition (the will) with respect to the gospel (the truth about who Christ is and what he accomplished on the cross). We could illustrate this logically by saying that FAITH = truth x positive volition (genuine yieldedness of the will). The absence of either core ingredient (truth {in the form of the gospel}, or yieldedness of the will {i.e., "receiving" or "accepting" that truth with all of its implications}) would not result in faith. Both truth and positive volition are necessary in order to produce saving faith. Consequently, from the human perspective, there are basically two areas in which a failure can occur such that a person does not come to have saving faith. Those two areas are "truth" and "volition."

We know from several passages discussed already that an apostate has at one time known and professed belief in the truth (cf. 2 Pt. 2:20; Heb. 10:26—both employ the term "*epignosis*" = sure, or certain knowledge). Once a person comes to have the *epignosis* there are two things that can occur to lead him or her to apostasy. The most obvious fault is an immediate and final refusal to yield one's self to the truth. The other, and perhaps not so obvious failure is that in the absence of a positive choice to accept Christ, the person may simply drift away from the truth of the gospel. In either case, the result is the same—a failure to exercise faith. (I am intentionally excluding any discussion of election and predestination, since we are focused on the human dimension of faith.)

Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 that one avenue of apostasy is that people are led astray into "demonic doctrine." It is instructive to note that these doctrines are communicated through the vehicle of religion.¹⁷ If that is surprising, we should note what Christ said about the religious system of His day

(Matt. 23:1-36, *cf.* 7: 21-23). Undoubtedly many fall into apostasy after coming to understand the gospel because they simply delay in responding and are diverted by false religion—always under the guise of “truth,” of course.

In Hebrews 3:13 the writer says, “lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” What is meant by “the deceitfulness of sin?” Simply that sin promises fulfillment, but it delivers death. Sin is a lie (Heb. 10:26-27). Once a person has come to the *epignosis*, or “sure knowledge” of the truth, the choice to remain in a state of sin is inherently a rejection of Christ (*cf.* v. 29). In other words, by an act of the will a choice is made in which the individual determines to yield himself to sin rather than to Christ. He has been yielding himself to sin all along, but the difference now is that the choice of sin is made in light of the *epignosis*, which in some cases results in a final decision from which the person will never turn. That final state is “apostasy.”

Whether the failure is an immediate rejection, or simply a delay in acting on the gospel, the one common thread is that the decision to yield one’s self to the demands of the gospel is not made promptly upon coming to the knowledge of the truth. The most dangerous position that a person can place himself into is having come to a knowledge of the truth, to delay in responding; for each moment that “Yes” is withheld is another “No!” One can quickly find himself, or herself, on an exponentially downward curve away from God.

The Characteristics of an Apostate

The purpose in exploring the characteristics of apostasy is not judgmental, but preventative—if we don’t know what apostasy is and what it looks like, we will be ill prepared to warn the church of what could happen. Just as some physical agents can be silent killers if we ignore proper warnings, so apostasy is a silent killer within every local church, and every congregation should be warned, lest anyone fall victim. What does apostasy look like? An apostate no longer holds to the truth of the gospel. (1 Timothy 4:1 and Hebrews 6:6—they “fall away from the faith;” Hebrews 3:6,14—they do not “hold fast” to the “confidence” or “assurance;” Hebrews 10:39—they “shrink back to destruction;” Hebrews 12:14—they do not “pursue” sanctification (the positional/imputed sanctification, acquired by faith, which is required for acceptance before God); Hebrews 12:25—they “turn away” from God (by turning away from the truth); 2 Peter 2:15—they “forsake (relinquish) the right way.” Apostates are often individuals who have permitted themselves to be deceived by false religion (2 Tim. 4:1-3). The heart of the apostate is an “evil,” “unbelieving” heart (Heb. 3:12). When an apostate chooses to remain in the church, they do so out of selfish motivation. They do not remain in the church to worship and serve God. [A person cannot reject Christ and love God at the same time (Jn. 5:23, *cf.* vv. 37-38). Their motivation is clearly indicated in 2 Peter 2:3 and Jude 12.] Apostates are people who have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13; 10:26; 2 Pt. 2:9-15). An apostate’s attitude toward Christ is one of absolute rejection (Heb. 6:6; 10:29; 12:25; 1 Pt. 2:1 “deny” = *arneomai* = “to renounce,” or “disclaim”). Apostates, by their own choice, are hopelessly lost individuals (Heb. 6:6). Their hopeless condition is not due to the fact that God has cut them off, but because they have cut themselves off from God. If a person rejects Christ as Savior at the highest level of revelation, conviction and calling after coming to the *epignosis*, they will never receive Him. (Remember the illustration of the magnets?)

It is important for us to understand that apostasy is a terminal condition. It is impossible to determine whether a specific living individual is an apostate—simply because we do not know that one has reached their closest and most convicting encounter with God. No living person who still has the opportunity to respond to the gospel should be regarded as an apostate; that’s not the purpose of the New Testament teaching. The point is not to classify and condemn others, but to warn the church of the potential risk of failing to act promptly on the gospel, and thus ultimately falling beyond hope.

The Danger Apostates Pose to the Local Church

Apostates sometimes become disseminators of heresy (2 Pt. 2:1). They often introduce their theological untruths “secretly” (*pareisago* = “clandestinely”). This might take one of two forms: formally

from a position of leadership, or informally as a member of a local congregation. Although apostates often pervert the Scripture, they have no lack of sympathizers. 2 Peter 2:2 says, “And many will follow their sensuality” (*aselgeia* = “intemperance,” “moral looseness”), by which they attract followers (v. 18). The effect of their influence is that the truth comes to be ridiculed (v. 2).

Apostates exploit the church to their own advantage (2 Pt. 2:3). The local church exists for two reasons: to build believers into the image of Jesus Christ, and to carry the gospel out into the world. An apostate is not interested in either of these two goals. He has rejected Christ as Messiah. He certainly has no interest in seeing believers molded into Christ’s image, or in seeing the gospel carried to the world. In 2 Peter 2:3 the word translated “exploit” is *emporeuomai*. It means to “traffic” or “trade.” Apostates “traffic” in religion. When they remain within the visible church, they are there for pride, power, self-promotion, or some other improper motivation, but not for the worship and service of God. Apostates endeavor to cause others to apostatize (2 Peter 2:14). They “entice” unstable souls (from *deleazo* meaning, “to trap with bait”). “Unstable souls” may be a reference to those who have heard the gospel and have yet to make a commitment, but have not reached the point of apostasy. Apostates “bait” their trap with an appeal to the fleshly nature (v. 2, “sensuality”). They both preach and practice according to the flesh.

Conclusions

Apostates are those who may experience “reformation,” but never experience “transformation”—that is to say, they are never genuinely converted to Christ. Having absorbed a measure of Christianity, without genuine spiritual renewal, some eventually fall away from their profession of faith, possibly even returning to a former religion, while others may remain within the church for self-interest or to disseminate false teaching. The thing that must be borne in mind is that such individuals were never saved. This is not a negatively judgmental assessment, but simply the application of the explicit teachings of Scripture. It is important that every church understand the potential for apostasy among its membership (including leaders), both for the purpose of warning and exhortation and in order to make theological sense out of the departure of those who once professed faith in Christ. (Churches breed apostates like hospitals breed germs.) Undoubtedly, the failure to understand what the Bible teaches on this pivotal subject, as well as lack of understanding of man’s total depravity, is at the root of Arminian misunderstanding. The New Testament warnings against apostasy are not warnings to Christians, but warnings to churches with mixed congregations, which of course includes every church; so it must be the job of every church to repeat these warnings lest anyone fail to take possession of salvation and thus fall short of the grace offered to them.

Notes

[All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB), unless otherwise indicated.]

¹Eternal destruction does not refer to annihilation, but perpetual punishment.

²According to this view, the “rest” referred to in Hebrews 3:18-4:13 does not illustrate salvation, but rather the rest a believer enters into when they learn to trust and obey God; thus it denotes a level of spiritual attainment. Proponents of this view argue that if the rest mentioned here (which Israel failed to enter) represents salvation, then that would imply that even Moses was not saved, since he did not enter the Promised Land. This objection fails to take into account the significance of the word “represents.” Israel’s failure to enter God’s rest (the promised land) “represents,” (analogically) or illustrates a lack of faith, which in the context of Hebrews Chapters 4-5 is applied to salvation. There is a vast difference in saying that something is an analogy and in saying that it is an “example” (*i.e.*, the very thing itself). If we said that Israel is used as an “example” of individual apostasy, this objection would be valid. As it is, the objection is not valid. We simply learn things from Israel’s collective disbelief that can be used to illustrate personal apostasy.

³The third class conditional (*ean*) indicates the propositional nature of the statement.

⁴One ought not to construe this to imply works salvation. The idea is not that one is saved because he, or she holds fast, but rather that holding fast is an invariable characteristic of true faith. So much so, that falling away (apostasy) simply indicates that there was never saving faith. One holds fast because they are saved, but they are not saved because they hold fast. Failure to make this distinction is the basis of much confusion.

⁵Although *parapipto* is used only here in the New Testament, we can get some feel for the term by observing the usage of *pipto* in Rom. 11:11 where it is translated “fall” and refers to a complete and irrecoverable fall. *Parapipto* (*pipto* with a prepositional prefix) is an intensified form of *pipto*.

⁶Although the KJV uses the word “condemnation” in reference to true believers (*cf.* James 5:9), this is a mistranslation of *krino*, which should be rendered, “to judge.” The NASB has corrected most of these references to read, “judged.” However, *katara* is never applied to saved people, since it is condemnation in the strictest sense of the word.

⁷*Echomena* is sometimes translated as a passive voice, but should be translated as a middle voice (*cf.* Roberson, WP, Vol. 5, page 396).

⁸*Dorea* (“gift”) occurs eleven times in the New Testament; six times it refers to the Holy Spirit as the gift, once it refers to righteousness as a gift, and three times it refers to grace as a gift. The identification in Hebrews 6:4 is uncertain; however, it seems likely that the Holy Spirit is in view.

⁹Partaking of the Holy Spirit should not be confused with partaking of Christ (3:14). In order to partake of the Holy Spirit, one merely needs to be confronted with the reality of the gospel through the illuminating and convicting work of the Holy Spirit. However, to be a partaker of Christ, one must receive the witness of the Spirit. So, while “partaker” in one context implies salvation, in the other it does not.

¹⁰In Ephesians 2:1-3 *ekdikesis* is equated with the wrath of God, which will be directed toward unbelievers.

¹¹The scope of a pronoun must be determined by the context. For instance, the pronoun “we” in verse 39 is clearly restricted to saved people because the context limits the reference to saved people. In verse 26 the reference clearly includes unsaved people.

¹²One of the potential problems in theological research is the tendency to link specific doctrines with a key word in the original, such that the original word is viewed as having only a narrow, technical meaning in Scripture. While it is true that a few terms in the original do take on a technical sense (*e.g.*, *ekklesia* = “church”), unwarranted restriction of general terms can lead to incorrect interpretation.

¹³The text says, “sanctification.” However, it is clear from the context that the reference is to positional sanctification. (Can we imagine the writer saying that a failure in experiential sanctification would keep one from seeing the Lord?) Since the verse is referring to positional sanctification, the significance is to salvation in general.

¹⁴*Cf.* 1 Timothy 1:9 where *bebelos* is translated “profane”—undoubtedly, a reference to the unsaved.

¹⁵*Apostrophomenoi*—middle voice, means “to reject or desert“ *cf.* Titus 1:14.

¹⁶The “rock” upon which Jesus will build His Church is not Peter (*petros* = “a stone,” or “pebble,” [masculine]), but upon the rock (*petra* = “rock,” [feminine] as in “bedrock,” *i.e.*, that upon which one would secure a foundation), referring to Peter’s confession of faith in the identity of Christ in verse 16. Peter may be only a pebble, but his confession of Christ’s identity, made on the basis of faith, is the foundation upon which the Church is built.

¹⁷The description in 1 Timothy 4:3 implies that the individuals referred to there were teachers of false religious precepts (forbidding marriage and advocating abstaining from certain foods); hence, religion is made a vehicle for the introduction of false doctrine.

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The Biblical Doctrine of Personal Apostasy

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