

Where Do We Go from Here?, Lesson 5

- Recent op-ed: “everyone is leaving Christianity, and nobody knows where they are going.”
 - This is happening so often that there is a new word that has been coined: instead of Evangelical, they are calling themselves Exvangelicals.
 - What is this all about and what, if anything does the Bible have to say about it?
 - Even among the first generation of Christians there were those who departed from the faith. **Demas: Colossians 4:14 and Philemon 1:23-24; II Timothy 4:10**
 - Jude is a book devoted to this topic: written by Jesus’ half-brother: **Jude 6** Even angels fell away; **Revelation 12** tells us it was $\frac{1}{3}$ of them that fell to the Devil’s deceptions.
 - Seems like we read more and more of those who have walked away from their faith.
 - 2008, $\frac{1}{3}$ of all Millennials described themselves as religiously unaffiliated, by 2018 that number had grown to 42%.
 - Church membership has suffered a decades long decline; 1980’s = 70% of Americans were church members; 2000 it is 65%; 2010 it was 59%; today it is at 47%.
 - The biggest issue is not falling out with the church but falling out with Jesus Himself.
 - People who have gone on record to say that they have turned their backs on the biblical Jesus, to use the terms of the writer of Hebrews: **Hebrews 10:29.**
 - Judas is the poster child for all of this stuff: He’s best example of someone falling away from Christ.
 - If someone who was in the inner 12 of Jesus’ followers can fall away, then we can see that this falling away is outside of our power to stop it.
 - He had the perfect testimony, evidence, and opportunity, yet he fell away.
 - If Jesus couldn’t reach and keep Judas, there will be some who come into our fellowships who we will not be able to keep either.
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1. What does this mean to us?

- ✓ Apostasy is not the same thing as atheism, “falling away” does not refer to those in general who refuse to believe or deny the truth of the gospel.
 - ✓ Apostasy is only a word for a very specific group: People who claim to, and act as believers, who eventually turn their backs on Christ.
 - ✓ The Greek word is found only twice in the New Testament: **Acts 21:21** and **2nd Thessalonians 2:3**, it means “a falling away from, a deserting from a position formerly held.”
 - ✓ An apostate is not one who was saved and lost his salvation, but is one claimed it but never actually believed in the first place.
 - ✓ Every apostate is an unbeliever but not every unbeliever is an apostate.
 - ✓ A person who has never heard, heard, and never professed belief, or is just a part of another religion is not an apostate.
 - ✓ You can’t walk away from something you never really heard of before.
 - ✓ An apostate is well acquainted with the gospel, knows more than enough to be saved, but he walks away from it.
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2. Why does this theme matter?

- ✓ The proliferation of apostasy is an important but overlooked part of the end times puzzle.
- ✓ One of the signs of the end times is the rise of those who claim to be Christians but who turn their backs on Christ. **Matthews 11:12-14**; Paul explains further: **2nd Thessalonians 2:1-3**
- ✓ "The Falling Away," the definite article in the Greek indicates that this is specific thing at specific time, not just random like we see it today.
- ✓ This will be part of the tribulation period because it is wedded to appearance of the Antichrist.

Timeline of events: 1. Rapture of the Church, 2. Rise of the Antichrist, 3. The Apostasy (the first 3 could happen almost simultaneously) 4. Covenant with Israel for 7 years starting the Tribulation, 5. Breaking of the Covenant with Israel at the 3.5 year interval 6. The Second Coming of Christ precisely at the end of those 7 years.

- ✚ This could all start immediately not way down the road, the elements of the start of this are already in place.
 - ✚ Already, the "feel-gooders" are preaching a Jesus who doesn't require us to own up to our sinful wretchedness, doesn't require repentance, doesn't require humbling and denying ourselves, **this Jesus doesn't exist**, but preachers are leading people to him every day, this is setting the stage for a falling away of fake believers.
 - ✚ The Bible predicts that there will be an incredible revival in the Tribulation: **Revelation 7:9; 13-15**.
 - ✚ 144,000 Jews will be preaching as well as two special witnesses in Jerusalem who will prophecy and perform incredible miracles in front of all the world at that time.
 - ✚ **1st John 2:18-19** There are people in the church who went out from us and became a part of the false gospel, because they were never really part of us.
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Matthew 24:12 What is this lawlessness and how could people fall away and deny Jesus?

- 1) They fall away because they are deceived about Jesus, a fake Jesus is far easier to believe in.
 - ✓ **1st Timothy 4:1-2; 2nd Timothy 4:3-4** The Myth-Jesus has a great following today.
 - 2) Some fall away because they are disillusioned. In Luke 8 Jesus tells a parable that explains reasons why people fall away from the truth, **Luke 8:4-15**.
 - ✓ Two out of the four are receptive but aren't truly converted because they bring forth no fruit ("**you will know them by their fruit**" not by their profession)
 - ✓ The first reason people walk away is because they are deceived by the devil and do not believe.
 - ✓ The second reason people walk away is, though they received it emotionally, they didn't actually believe in the real Jesus but some version of Jesus they have invented, they were not looking for a Savior but a solution.
 - ✓ Real Christians hang on because the gospel hangs on to them; the real issue is not someone's power to believe as much as it is the gospel's power to save.
 - ✓ When someone falls away, it is not because of any weakness on the part of the gospel or the Shepherd, it is because they never actually came under that power to begin with.
 - ✓ They believed because it was going to make them feel better, get them out of trouble, make their marriage better or some other reason other than being saved from eternal fire, if you believe for the wrong reasons, ***you've believed the wrong thing***.
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- 3) Some fall away because they are distracted. The weeds get in the way of true belief.
- ✓ **Verse 14 "choked with cares and pleasures of life"** they simply choose the easy life, money, pleasures of the temporary life over Jesus.
 - ✓ They let go of their faith to get all that the world has for them.
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3. What do we do now?

- ✓ It's easy to be discouraged as a believer, as a pastor or church leader.
- 1) Examine yourselves, **2nd Corinthians 13:5**. Not a Christian because you grew up in the church, your parents were Christians, you lived a good life, or because you're not a Muslim or Mormon or Hindu.
- ✓ Not because you have served in the church and done great things for God. **Matthew 7:21-23**.
 - ✓ Are you certain that you have Jesus? have you repented of what you thought would save you and turned to Christ for forgiveness and rescue?
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- 2) Encourage yourselves, **1st Samuel 30:6**. When we are discouraged, we begin to entertain doubt, the solution is to encourage ourselves
- ✓ Remind yourself of the Lord's faithfulness to you, review what the scriptures say.
 - ✓ Learn how to take care of yourself in the Word of God and prayer.
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- 3) Exercise yourself, **1st Timothy 4:7-8**. If you want to stay confident in your faith, you have to keep growing in it.
- ✓ Stagnant faith is the devil's playground. He will fill your heart and mind with doubts if you let him.
 - ✓ Worse thing you could ever do is put God on hold in your life because you have lots to do or things you want to do.
 - ✓ If you are thinking you can get by without God, that's the time you need Him the most because that is the time of greatest deception for us.
 - ✓ **Philippians 3:13-14**, "Let us press on," set new goals for your growth in Christ and what you are going to do for Him and for others in His name.
 - ✓ **Jude 1:20-21** Speaking to believers who need to keep on doing this.
 - ✓ It is possible to start out well loving Jesus, and then you realize one day that things aren't the same. Nothing stays up unless you hold it up.
 - ✓ **Revelation 2:4-5** Some have lost their lampstand over neglect, doesn't say we can't get it back.
 - ✓ If you are still here, the race isn't over for you!

Jude 1:24-25 "Now all glory to God, who is able to keep you from falling away and will bring you with great joy into his glorious presence without a single fault. ²⁵ All glory to him who alone is God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord."
