

Apostasy Means Rebellion

New Testament prophecy describes two distinct streams of Christianity that operate side by side as in the end of time. Jesus, in that informative Olivet end-time discourse, stated in His opening comment: "Take heed that no man deceive you ... many false prophets shall arise, and deceive many ... insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:4, 11, 24).

Paul, God's replacement apostle, noted:

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:1-2).

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (II Timothy 3:13).

God's people are faced with three types of deceptions as these two distinct "Christian" movements mature:

- Decent of wicked men who shamelessly try to lead others to sin (Ephesians 5:6): "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."
- Leaders who appeal to a sensory religious experience (II Timothy 4:3-4): "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."
- Those who subvert the gospel of Jesus and the depth of our friendship with Him (Colossians 2:8; II Corinthians 11:4, 13; II Peter 2:1):
 - "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."
 - "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.... For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ."
 - "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

In Christ's warning to the inquiring disciples He said that "many" would be deceived, suggesting multitudes would accept spurious ideas and ideals. The admonition was directed at the professing church. There is a turning away from truth, God's high standards and a saving relationship with Jesus.

It is interesting that the possibility of apostasy is denied by its lack of discussion and even more, a failure to scrutinize what this rebellion means by churches today! In the Old Testament

a Hebrew word, pasha, is used to define such rebellion. It is against God's authority, law and covenant. Daniel reveals that that end-time apostasy will lead to desolation (8:13, 17, 19).

Jesus solemnly cautioned against such a denial: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Individual responsibility is called into action. The Bible warns against leaning even on church leaders for understanding of truth: "Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart" (Jeremiah 14:14 NIV).

Apostasy is a sign of the end. It transcends the fantasy of many that it is the "other" church or it is only those in "Babylon." The Biblical injunctions are so numerous that the "enemy" might really be me. That's why Jesus was adamant that the elect, those who think and should know, are at risk of deception.

Paul noted that "in the last days perilous times shall come." After listing the evil that would infiltrate the world, he describes these individuals as having "corrupt minds," reprobate or nefarious spirits "concerning the faith" (II Timothy 3:1, 8). The last part of his "list" refers to those "in-house" – within the church. They "resist truth" (3:8) ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of truth (3:7). What were they doing? Studying the wrong things.

Jude states that 'certain men crept in unawares,' "ungodly men" (Jude 4). He exhorted, "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) for "men [shall] arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). The deceptions within the church will be rampant.

It eventually reaches a point where "whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). This specifically refers to "loyalists" in "God's work." It is not a Pol Pol, Mao, Stalin, Hussein or Hitler. It represents what the Catholic Church did during the Dark Ages and what we see now in the Muslim reaction to Christians. But soon it will be even worse. Those within our own sphere will rebel. Then the great image to the beast will epitomize the final life and death apostasy with its mark.

Under a myriad of guises, the apostasy has begun – from doctrinal error to supernatural signs. Benny Hinn (with support from Paul and Jan Crouch) on TBN has "performed" spiritualistic miracles (power he claims pick up at the graves of Kathryn Kuhlman and Aime Semple McPherson). In many charismatic "spirit" filled services people roar like lions, bark like dogs, display contortions of their body, experience violent shaking or become dumb.

John said of apostate Protestantism after describing their doing "great wonders," he "deceiveth them that dwell on the earth" because of "those miracles which he had power to do (Revelation 13:13-14).

Again and again the Scriptures reveal the foundational issue at the end: "They receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.... For this cause God shall send them a strong

delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believe not the truth (II Thessalonians 2:10-12). This later statement is most interesting. A point is reached when God backs away (Romans 1:25-26). His longsuffering and pleading Spirit ceases. Mercy's last call ends. Justice lies ahead.

End-Time Focus

Paul was made aware that some in the Thessalonian church believed that Jesus had already come (II Thessalonians 3:6-15). This brought unrest, misguided excitement and confusion. To quiet this, he tendered a second letter and noted two things that must come before the parousia (II Thessalonians 2:3).

1. Rebellion ("the apostasy")
2. Man of sin was to be revealed

Though apostasy existed then (Hebrews 6:6; I John 2:19, 18), it was not the final climatic manifestation. Though a Scriptural picture of Christian apostasy is painted through Babylonian imagery at the end, another rebellion is of paramount concern to Seventh-day Adventists. It represents one of the two streams of end-time Christianity.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's this church went through a crisis of almost crippling proportions. E. G. White called that the "alpha" of apostasy. But she was directed to know that a similar experience would strike again shortly before Jesus would return. That, she called, the "omega" apostasy.

"Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature."¹

What does that mean? What are we to look for? Why isn't it depicted in clear terms Biblically? What is seen as the apostasy Biblically tied to Babylon is a partial portrayal of what happens within the Adventist Church. Here's why we must come to attention:

1. The seven churches of Revelation have several applications:
 - In John's day as literal messages of literal churches
 - Historical periods of the Christian Church – a difficult exercise to be precise
 - Typologically representative of all Christian bodies at the end (their full and most important expression)
2. The seven churches are represented in Revelation 1 as candlesticks that Christ, in pastoral imagery, is walking among.

¹ *Testimonies for the Church Containing Letters to Physicians and Ministers Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 16 (1904).

3. By Revelation 11 there are only two candlesticks remaining. They are Smyrna and Philadelphia (a separate study). Where are the rest? They apostasized and all have become Babylon – not symbolized by a candlestick but a harlot woman (Thyatira was its introduction in Revelation).
4. Laodicea, often seen as being the seventh, final church simply does not go through to the end! Remember, the churches are not numbered like the Seals, Trumpets or Vials – thus, not necessarily in sequence.

The church victorious, the 144,000 imagery, is seen beautifully described in Philadelphia. It is a remnant. In the study of the key characteristics of the churches and the prophetic messages in Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation, it is clear that apostasy comes to this church and a terrible shaking occurs. The remnant, the body of believers who represent the white horse (first Seal), who go out conquering and to conquer, are those who remain. They are the remnant of a generalized apostasy that infiltrates all Christian institutions and churches. They are the prophetic children of Daniel 8:14, when Jesus said (and it was His words) that after 2300 evenings and mornings holiness would be vindicated or adjudicated. How? By God's review of the books and choosing forever witnesses to His character – His final church.

Do we have more information regarding the omega apostasy that hits Adventism?

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? – The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced. The founders of this system would go into the cities and do a wonderful work. The Sabbath, of course, would be lightly regarded, as also the God who created it. Nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the new movement.”²

What are the characteristics?

1. Doctrinal pillars would be given up – which would include Sabbath sacredness.
2. Books to justify these new views would be introduced.
3. The church structure would be redefined.
4. There would be intellectual/philosophical concepts brought forward.
5. The movement would be powerful and unyielding.

In the next article we will begin to explore how God defines rebellion. It was an issue with Israel, it is an issue with the Protestant world and is a growing reason Adventism is fracturing.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40 (1906).

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