

Responding to Apostates in the Church

Definition: We must first define apostate or one who is involved in apostasy. The word *apostasy* is only used 2x in the NT: Acts 21:21 (*forsake*) (Paul was accused of apostasy under the law) and II Thess. 2:3 (*falling away*) where it is used eschatologically. In the Greek OT, there are 3 uses: Josh. 22:22; II Chron. 29:19; and Jer. 2:19. The word *apostasy* designates a *falling away from the faith* as the word is compound in the Greek for *apo* (away from) and *stasis* (rebellion). Inherent in the word is rebellion against God, an abandonment or revolt. The word has the idea of *defection or forsaking especially religious beliefs*.

Another word that is also in the same grammatical family is the Greek word *aphistemi*. While the Greek word does have a physical meaning of departing, the spiritual use means *to fall away, to forsake, to turn away, to rebel, or to abandon*. It is used in the LXX as a technical term for religious apostasy (Deut. 32:15; Jer. 3:14 - backsliding; Isa. 30:1- rebellious).

Definition: An apostate is a person who has departed from the faith. This person has defected or abandoned God as evidenced by rejecting former beliefs. “The term generally refers to a deliberate renouncing of the faith by a once sincere believer rather than a state of ignorance or mistaken knowledge. Apostasy is distinguished from heresy (denial of a part of the faith) and from transfer of allegiance from one religious body to another within the same faith. Also, it is possible to deny the faith, as Peter once did, and then at a later time reaffirm it”.¹

An apostate is not a true believer nor could they have been before they apostatized. For the sake of this short sermon I am using apostate in a general sense of someone who once was a “part of the true faith of following Jesus Christ” but has since left the faith to follow clear Bible heresy and lead others down the same path. I also recognize that a false teacher in the church may be classified as an apostate and in some ways they could be synonyms. Some people will distinguish apostates different than false teachers but for the sake of this lesson, I am considering them similar – both unbelievers choosing to preach, teach, and believe consistently against major doctrines in God’s Word. In this study I chose to consider multiple passages that include false teachers in them.

All apostates are false teachers or believe in false doctrine but technically not all false teachers could be considered apostates. But I believe many in the church that are false teachers or teaching false doctrine are apostates for many began “believing in the truth of God’s Word”.

Ultimately God is the Judge of who is truly saved and who isn’t. Jesus preached in Matt. 7:22 that many would say “Lord, Lord,” and yet on judgment day He will say “I never knew you. . . “

Verses: I Tim. 4:1-3; II Thess. 2:3; II Tim. 3:1-9; II Tim. 4:3-4; Heb. 3:12; II Pet. 2:1-3; II Pet. 3:17; Jude 3-4

- Apostasy is a *falling from the faith* – I Tim. 4:1
- Apostasy is a *heart of unbelief* – Heb. 3:12
- Apostasy is a *departure from the living God* – Heb. 3:12
- Apostasy is *encouraged by false teachers* – Gal. 2:4; I Tim. 6:3-5; II Pet. 2:1-3
- Apostates *bring in damnable heresies* – II Pet. 2:1
- Apostates *deny the Lord that bought them* – II Pet. 2:1
- Apostates *lead others away with the error of the wicked* – II Pet. 3:17
- Apostates *pervert the gospel of Christ* – Gal. 1:6-8
- Apostates *turn away from the truth and turn to fables* – II Tim: 4:3-4
- Apostates *deny Jesus Christ came in the flesh* – II John 7
- Apostates *turn the grace of God into sensuality* – Jude 4
- Apostates *deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ* – Jude 4

Questions: So, how should we as true believers in the church respond to those who A) Attempt to teach apostasy in the church B) Teach apostasy outside the church or C) Who are friends that we interact with yet truly have apostatized from the past.

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In [Tyndale Bible dictionary](#) (p. 95). Tyndale House Publishers.

Principles from passages on false teaching/teachers:

- 1) Beware of what false teachers and those who are in apostasy can do towards you – Col. 2:8
- 2) Walk in the ways of Christ where you are growing spiritually on a daily basis – Col. 2:6-7
- 3) Do not be deceived – II Thess. 2:3
- 4) Do not give heed to false doctrines – I Tim. 1:3-4
- 5) Withdraw yourself from those who teach apostasy – I Tim. 6:5
- 6) Continue to learn and apply the truths of God’s Word so as to not fall prey to the deception of the enemies (II Tim. 3:13-17)
- 7) If they are teaching within the church, they must be silenced (Titus 1:11). The way they would be silenced is to be disciplined out of the church if they didn’t change their ways.
- 8) Rebuke them (Titus 1:13 – See v. 16) – “The ultimate goal of discipline should be to recover the one who is in error (Gal. 6:1; 2 Thes. 3:14–15). In the present case Paul hoped that Titus’ severe rebuke would be enough to bring the errorists around so that they would cease paying **attention to Jewish myths and to the commands of those who reject the truth**”.²
- 9) Give them over to the hand of God – II Pet. 2:1-9

General principles regarding unsaved:

- 1) Pray for them
- 2) Love them
- 3) Treat them as unsaved people
- 4) Do not spend hours and hours seeking people who once claimed they knew the truth and have repudiated it. They know the truth so continually speaking to them what they already know will be often a dead end. Having said that if there are legitimate opportunities to speak truth, then speak the truth in love.

General principles of the dangers of unbelieving friendships

- 1) While we should maintain friendships with those in the world, we must guard ourselves at being like or succumbing to “worldly” friends.
- 2) “The Bible gives warnings about the wrong types of friends. We are not to be friends with a hot-tempered person, for example (Proverbs 22:24–25). And Proverbs 1:10–19 and 4:14–19 warn against those who entice us to do wrong. We should not associate with evildoers, no matter how great the promised reward or how appealing their “friendship” seems to be. Those whose “feet rush to sin” should be avoided at all costs. The path they choose is no place for a Christian whose choice should be to follow the “path of the righteous.” Only that path leads to friendship with God” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-friends.html>).
- 3) We must guard our lives against those “friends” who would seek to subvert us and bring us to a place of apostasy ourselves.
- 4) Find godly, Christian friends who have a desire to follow and love God, emulate Jesus Christ, and love others.

Conclusion

The Bible remains crystal clear: false teachers and apostates are far from the truth and should be rejected. We must not waste much of our time attempting to win back those who once “knew” the truth. While there may be opportunities to speak to these people, we must be steadfastly careful and resolute to place our eyes on God’s Word, our ears to the Holy Spirit, and our eyes on the eternal things of heaven. Too many people have fallen into the apostates trap and have become like them. If we find them in our local church, we must speak truth in love but quickly ridding our body of the potential fast moving false doctrine that they teach. God, help us have discernment in these things.

² Litfin, A. D. (1985). [Titus](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 763). Victor Books.