

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Apostates, Be Warned, Part 1**

Scripture: Jude 5

Code: 65-5

We return in our study of the Word of God to the book of Jude. And as I said at the very outset, though this is a rather short epistle as biblical books go, it is deep and high and wide. There is much here to absorb. This epistle is about contending for the faith. Verse 3 is the key verse. "I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith." The Christian faith which was once by means of inspiration delivered to the saints. We are in a war to protect the truth.

This epistle looks particularly at those who assault the truth from inside the church. This is not about attacks from the outside, but the inside, the much more devastating, the much more subtle, the much more destructive assault on the truth from those who profess to know the truth. We have to battle inside. It's as if we are in a fortress and ready to defend that fortress and its contents from those who would attack from the outside, all the while having to face an insidious eruption of rebellion on the inside so that we are always fighting on two fronts.

There will always be, according to the Word of God, assaults on the truth from the inside and the Bible calls this, at least in one aspect, apostasy, that is a departure from the faith among those who have professed it, who have known it. We know that in the last days, as we are certainly in the last days, there will be the apostasy. Second Thessalonians 2 verse 3 says, "The day of the Lord will not come until the apostasy comes." Jesus even predicted at the end of the age that there would be a falling away from the faith. As we know as well, the Apostle Paul warned about this departure from the faith. The Apostle John warned about this defection and this departure from the faith. And John went to great lengths, as we learned in the three epistles, to help us discern our own true spiritual condition and recognize spirits that are not of God, but are rather the spirit of error, not the Spirit of truth. Apostasy is characterized by denial of the truth. It can be a denial, for example, of God's reality. It can be a denial of the true nature of God. It can start there. Anyone who calls himself a Christian and denies the true nature of God has defected from the truth. They are those, according to 2 Timothy 3:5, who hold to a form of godliness but deny its power. They want you to believe that they belong within the realm of the true faith, but in reality they have denied true godliness and its power. They are, in fact, not at all lovers of God, writes Paul in that same passage.

It can also be a denial of Christ, an attack on the person of Christ. Second Peter 2 says, "Denying the Master or the Lord, who bought them." It then may be a defective theology. It may be a defective Christology. It can be a denial even of the coming of Christ, such as those scoffers and mockers in 2 Peter 3 who say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" A denial of the person, a denial of the work,

a denial of the return of Christ. This too constitutes a kind of apostasy.

It can be a denial of the Christian faith at any point and we are reminded that we should expect this. The Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 4 says the Spirit explicitly tells us that in later times some will fall away from the faith. That is the content of the Christian gospel. So it may be an attack on God. It may be an attack on Christ. It may be an attack on the gospel, the way of salvation. And in its place comes doctrines of demons propagated by deceitful spirits by means of the hypocrisy of liars who are unconscionable. It is then always to be understood as a denial of sound doctrine. That's why in 2 Timothy 4 we read, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. They will turn away their ears from the truth, turn aside to myths." It always includes a denial of holy living. These who deny the true faith are lovers of self, lovers of money, 2 Timothy 3, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God who again have a form of godliness but without power.

This apostasy, this denial of the true God, or the true Christ, or the true gospel, or the true faith, sound doctrine, shows up in their lives because apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the flesh cannot be controlled. And so people who deny the Christian gospel do so not because of intellectual reasons, but because of moral reasons. Men love darkness rather than light, so look closely and by their fruits you will know them and their fruits will always be corrupt. Sometimes this corruption takes the form of a superficial kind of righteousness, a superficial kind of spirituality, an external kind of spirituality in which holiness is equated with as 1 Timothy 4 says, forbidding marriage, holiness is equated with celibacy such as we see in the Catholic Church and are learning that celibacy is no holy posture to take. Or as among the Jews, holiness may be equated as 1 Timothy 4:3 says with abstaining from certain foods. That is to say there are legalistic approaches to this kind of apostasy in which men on the surface appear to be more holy and therefore truer in embracing the Christian faith, when the fact of the matter is, those external things are no evidence of holiness at all but rather of a misguided legalism.

But on the other hand, apostasy sometimes takes the form of outright, blatant iniquity. Apostates, it says, in the eighteenth verse of Jude are those who walk or follow after their own ungodly lusts.

So, apostasy takes the form of denial. Denial of the true God, denial of the true Christ, denial of the true gospel, denial of the true doctrine, denial of holy living, denial of morality. And we would certainly conclude that they in the end deny necessarily the authority of Scripture in their lives. Such people are not eager to have the Word of God imposed upon them.

This apostasy rises up inside the church. We have people in the church today who deny the true God and have created a God of their own whom they call the true God. We have those within the framework of Christianity in the...mark this carefully...the visible church, not the invisible church,

within the visible church who deny the character and nature of Christ, who deny salvation by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone, who deny sound doctrine, who deny the true and biblical doctrine of sanctification, who deny true spirituality, who live lives filled with ungodly lust and who do not submit to the Word of God.

Now, this is nothing new. This is very old. There have always been apostates and they've been a part of the visible people of God. As with regard to the nation Israel, not all Israel is Israel, remember? Paul says in Romans 2:28 and 29, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, he is one who is one inwardly." And there was a difference between redeemed Israel and natural Israel, or physical Israel. And there is a great difference between the visible church, the church you can see, the church that is identified as such, and the invisible church. That is a distinction that theologians have always made. Those who are true believers make up the invisible church. That is to say that the world cannot see when they look at the congregation of the church or those who call themselves Christians, they cannot see who is the real church and who is not. They can see only the visible church, not the invisible church. It does not yet appear what we shall be. The glorious manifestation of the true sons of God has not yet appeared. So mingled with the visible church, hidden as it were in the visible church is the invisible church. And if we have a difficult time sorting out the wheat from the tares, we could well nigh be sure that the world couldn't do it. And that's why it makes being a Christian so difficult because we have to explain away things that the visible church does that the invisible church would never do. So apostasy has always been around, there's absolutely nothing new about it.

Now, let's go back to Jude. Going back to Jude we remember that he began with a greeting, "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who are the called, beloved of God and kept for Jesus Christ." In the opening then he identifies the invisible church, the called, the loved and the kept. And to them he says, "May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you." He affirms then in verses 1 and 2 the true believers. And then in verse 3 he speaks of his very important mission in this letter. "I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write you, appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." He calls upon the invisible church, the true and living church, to go to war for the truth because, verse 4, "Certain persons have crept in unnoticed." They are in the church, inside the visible church. "They have come in unnoticed, they were those long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, they are ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ."

You have seen a very clear illustration of that in the ordination of the Episcopalian Bishop Robinson who is a blatant and outspoken homosexual who is a licentious, lascivious, ungodly man denying our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ who has come into the church, the unwitting, stupid and ignorant visible church has ordained him to Christian ministry. And he is a man marked out for condemnation by God. Not everybody in the visible church is as blatant as that. That's fairly easy to spot. It's the subtleties that we sometimes miss. It's the nuances on the person of God, or the person of Christ, or

the gospel that we can't really discern because the church has such a deficient immune system.

And so, we have seen a greeting and a warning and a description of the problem, the subtle infiltration of apostasy and their strategy. We come now to verses 5 to 7 and in verse 4 it says, "These apostates are marked out for condemnation because they are ungodly," that is they do not know God and there are moral overtones to the term "ungodly." It is not just what they don't believe, it's how they behave. "Because they turn the grace of God into licentiousness, as it were, believing that they have been given grace by God they can live anyway they want. And they blatantly deny truly our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ because they are absolutely disobedient to His Word." So we have...we have seen this pronouncement that the apostates are going to be condemned.

And then in verses 5 to 7 we move into a section on their destruction. It's interesting to me that Jude starts the letter with this treatment of the condemnation and the destruction of apostates. Why does he do that? Because this entire letter is not only written to call us all to war to defend the faith, but it constitutes the most direct warning to apostates sitting in the church. And there's no sense in waiting to the end to get the earning out. That's why immediately after calling us to war in verse 3, in verse 4 he talks about the condemnation of these ungodly apostates. And to make that warning clear, Jude selects three incidents from history in verses 5 through 7, three incidents. One involving the Jews, one involving the Gentiles and one involving the angels in the order of the Jews, the angels and the Gentiles. Here you have three historic accounts of God dealing with apostasy which demonstrates how God reacts to it no matter who it is, whether it is Israel, chosen people, whether it is angels, or whether it is Gentiles, apostates are doomed.

Now in 2 Peter chapter 2, before we look at these specifically, I want you to turn over to verses 4 to 8 because in that particular section of 2 Peter you have a very similar text and you'll certainly want to compare the two. In 2 Peter 2 verses 4 through 8, Peter also speaks of the destruction of apostates. Chapter 2 verse 1, it says they are bringing swift destruction upon themselves, these false teachers who secretly introduce destructive heresies and deny the Master who bought them. That is an echo of Jude verse 4. Peter was writing of the same matter and because of them Peter writes in verse 2, "Many follow their sensuality," always they're driven by sensuality. People reject the gospel because they do not want to give up their sin. And because of them the way of the truth is maligned. That is true. You have people inside the church, apostates inside the church who call themselves true teachers, who call themselves representatives of Christianity who bring terrible, terrible criticism upon Christianity. They exploit people, it says in verse 3, but their judgment from long ago is not idle and their destruction is not asleep. They're going to be destroyed. So Peter says the same thing Jude says.

And then, Peter gives three illustrations. God didn't spare angels when they sinned, when they apostatized, defected, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness reserved for judgment. Second illustration, He didn't spare the ancient world. That is the world before Noah, but

preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. And thirdly, 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 thereafter. Peter says there are three historic judgments of apostasy, those who knew the truth and defected from it, the angels, the human race up to the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah.

Now let's turn to Jude. Jude uses three illustrations and two of them are the same. Verses 5 through 7, "Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord after saving a people out of the land of Egypt subsequently destroyed those who did not believe, and angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper abode He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day; just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire." These are three illustrations...the Jews, the angels and the Gentiles of Sodom and Gomorrah. And in each case there was destruction, judgment and the punishment of eternal fire, illustrations of God's inevitable and inexorable judgment on apostasy.

And the warning needs to be made very clear. There is a hell, it is forever, it is a burning place of horrific torment, and you will go there forever if you defect from the faith. And the more you know of the Christian faith, the hotter your hell will be when you reject it, as we will see. Better you never heard the gospel than to have heard it and rejected it. Better you never were taught the Word of God than to have been taught it and rejected it.

Now these three illustrations are well known to us and to the readers, and that's why in verse 5 Jude begins by saying, "I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all." It isn't as if he has to go into a lot of detail, these are very familiar stories. And we know them well, as Jude's readers knew them well. But there is somehow a penchant for forgetfulness among us, is it not so? There is a rather continuous decay of our knowledge, demanding reminders especially when we're talking about apostasy, we need to be reminded of its seriousness.

Illustration number one is with regard to Israel in verse 5. "I desire to remind you though you know all things once for all that the Lord after saving a people out of the land of Egypt subsequently destroyed those who did not believe." That little phrase "now I desire to remind you," tells us they had information about this. They had certainly the Old Testament account which was very, very familiar to them, to all who came out of Jewish background. The most familiar of all stories in the Old Testament was the story of God delivering the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt. It was the most frequently told story. It was the story marked out by the Passover which was the highest occasion in the Jewish year. God's redemption of His people out of Egyptian slavery and bondage was the greatest of all stories. He says, "I desire to remind you." This is just to put you in memory. The word actually is to remind, but surely they had not only the knowledge from their Jewish background, but

the Apostles and whoever had taught them certainly had reiterated this as well. It was Jesus Himself who transformed the Passover into the Lord's table and that transition must have been taught to them. They were very, very familiar with this story but how important it is to be reminded since, as I said, we are prone to forgetfulness. Drop down to verse 17 and you'll see a reminder of that again, "But you, beloved, ought to remember the words that were spoken beforehand by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ." And there again Jude is calling upon them to go back and to remember something that they had previously heard. In 2 Peter chapter 1, Peter follows that same pattern. Look at 2 Peter 1:12, "Therefore I shall always be ready to remind you of these things even though you already know them and have been established in the truth which is present with you, but I consider it right as long as I am in this earthly dwelling to stir you up by way of reminder."

Any teacher knows that. Any teacher knows that. Though you know all things once for all...better yet...though you knew it all once. Now since it is a reminder, that's important, there's no need to get extensively involved in the record. Just jog the memory. All of us who teach do this. And Jude is simply refreshing them about two basic facts...the fact of deliverance and the fact of destruction. "The Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who didn't believe." Some manuscripts read, "Jesus." But the Lord is the best attested manuscript. "The Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, destroyed the very people He had saved."

Let's go back and think about that story just briefly. It's told in Exodus 6 through 14, that section, you don't need to look at it, just remind you of what it is.

And you remember what happened, the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. They had been there by the time they left for 400 years. They were out in a section called Goshen. Life was very difficult for them, became more difficult for them as time went on. They were asked to make bricks without straw and it was a very, very difficult time. God raised up Moses in Pharaoh's court. God brought him to prominence. Moses had to flee after he killed an Egyptian who was harming one of his people. He fled to Median, he was there in Median. God put him back together in the scene of the burning bush, called him to go back, lead his people out. He confronted Pharaoh. Pharaoh hardened his heart and eventually God hardened Pharaoh's heart. A series of plagues took place. Finally the last plague was the death of the firstborn and the only way you could avoid having the firstborn in your house killed was to put blood on the doorpost and the lintel and offer the sacrifice and eat the Passover. Then there was the Exodus as the people went out of the land, as the Red Sea opened they passed through the Red Sea, the army of Pharaoh followed and the sea closed in and drowned them all. An entire nation of people out of Egypt were moved, up to two million of them headed for the promised land that God had originally pledged to Abraham, reiterated to Isaac and to Jacob.

Now at the time of the Passover, those people believed God. When God said to them, "You put the blood on the door and I'll pass by and you'll live," they did it. They did it. And they kept that Passover.

And God rescued them out of Egypt. God's mighty power fulfilled God's great promise and led Israel out of Egypt, headed north toward the promised land of Canaan after 400 years of being out of their land, the land where Abraham had originally come when God had first called him. But the very same Lord who delivered Israel, it says, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. Subsequently in the Greek is *deuteron* from which we get Deuteronomy, it means second. The first time He delivered them, the second time He destroyed them. The first time He came to save, the second time He came to destroy. That parallels Jesus Christ. The first time He comes to save, the second time He comes to destroy. And, of course, the story of Israel's unbelief is told in Numbers chapter 14 and you will remember that once they got out in the wilderness, they began to complain and to grumble and to murmur and they began to call upon Moses even to take them back to Egypt. They were an unfaithful people. Numbers chapter 14 they said, "Let's appoint a leader and return to Egypt." They did so many sinful things in doubting God, they even worshiped the golden calf, you know all those terrible stories of their defection.

In verse 22 of Numbers 14, God says this, "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, you were all there in Egypt. You saw, you saw the plagues, you saw all ten of the plagues which I performed in Egypt in the wilderness. Yet you have put Me to the test these ten times." And if you follow the record since they left Egypt, I listed in the MacArthur Study Bible ten different events that demonstrated their unbelief. God's counting and ten times you've put Me to the test and not listened to My voice. "Therefore shall...you shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it."

Now what was the event that triggered this? They got right to the edge of the promised land, to Kadesh. They sent the spies into the land. The spies came out, said, "We can't conquer that land, they're giants in there." There were only two of the spies that said, "Let's go, God's on our side." They were Joshua and Caleb, right? And so God says, down in verse 28, "As I live, this is what I'm going to do to you, your corpses shall fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men according to your complete number from 20 years old and upward who have grumbled against Me." Everybody 20 and up, and I think I could calculate about one-point-two, or three million people were going to die in the wilderness, the rest would have been under that age. You will not come into the land which I swore to settle you.

Verse 32, "Your corpses shall fall in this wilderness and your sons are going to be shepherds for 40 years in this wilderness and it's going to take 40 years for all of you to die out according to the number...verse 34...of the days which you spied out the land, 40 days for every day you'll bear your guilt a year." Forty years for forty days and you're going to die out and none of you will go into the land except for two, Joshua and Caleb. And Aaron because of his sin died in the wilderness and Moses because of his sin of disobedience, striking the rock rather than speaking to the rock, never went into the land either. Because of unbelief, God destroyed them all in the wilderness. They all died. They never saw the promised land.

Well what is the point here? It's just an illustration of the fact that people who were given spiritual opportunity who are called to believe the truth about God, to trust in God, to put their faith in God, who know enough to do that, who see enough to do that and defect will find the same God that gave them that opportunity will be the same God who destroys them. The historical illustration makes it clear here that Jude is describing people who are outwardly identified with the people of God, who professed the knowledge of God, who have some knowledge of God, who showed some interest in Him, who professed to know Him, belong to Him. But abandoned their confidence in God, abandoned their trust in God, became unbelieving and were therefore destroyed rather than ever entering the place of blessing.

This is a terrifying warning, folks, to apostates, to people today, those of you who come all the way to the edge of the truth, who see it and understand it, who experience it in the lives of the people around you, and you do not believe. God's judgment on Israel at this point is a model for His judgment on apostates in the visible church. And well over a million bodies died in the wilderness, never to see the land of milk and honey, the land of blessing. And it says there in verse 5, "God subsequently destroyed those who did not believe." That's the issue always. They came all the way up to the edge, but didn't really believe. And again I say, visible Israel was not the true Israel and the visible church is not the invisible church. And many, many people will go to hell from a pew, some of you, no doubt, as well. The analogy is sobering, if not frightening.

For a further understanding of that analogy, turn to Hebrews chapter 3...Hebrews chapter 3. And this is one that cannot be avoided because it strengthens this same truth. And we can look down at verse 7...well, verse 6 is a good place to start. "We belong to Christ...he says...Christ is faithful as a Son over his house whose house we are, we belong to Christ, we're the invisible church, the true church, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our home firm till the end," if you don't defect.

"Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me as in the day of trial in the wilderness where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for 40 years, therefore I was angry with this generation and said they always go astray in their heart and they did not know My ways as I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest. Take care, brethren...Jewish brethren in this case, written to the Hebrews...lest there should be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God."

In fact, verse 13 says, "You better encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called today, as long as you have a day lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance, sure to the end. While it is said, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me. For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses and with whom He was angry for 40 years, was it not with those who sinned whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest? That is the land of

Canaan, but to those who were disobedient." And verse 19, "And so we see they were not able to enter because of...what?...unbelief...unbelief."

And then in chapter 4 verses 1 and 2, "Let us fear therefore," you better be afraid, "while you still have a promise remaining of entering His rest, be afraid that any one of you should seem to have come short of it, for indeed we have had the good news preached to us, just as they also. But the word they heard didn't profit them because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, as I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest." You'll never enter heaven unless you believe. And you only have today. Do not harden your hearts as those in the wilderness with whom God was angry, who died without ever entering the promised land. And their hearts grew harder and harder and harder as they continually resisted the truth.

The book of Hebrews is filled with such warnings. Turn back to chapter 2 verse 3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" There is no way to escape the judgment of God. Verse 2 says, "Every transgression, every disobedience will receive a just reward, a just recompense and you will not escape if you neglect the salvation that is in Christ and Christ alone." You see it in verse 4 of chapter 6, "For in the case of those who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and made partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word of God, tasted the power of the age to come," and here we're referring to the apostolic power at the very ministry of Jesus, to those who were enlightened, their minds received the truth. They tasted the heavenly gift of salvation in Christ. It was there for them to taste. They tasted the power of the Holy Spirit working through Him, they tasted the good Word of God in His teaching. They tasted the power of the age to come in His miracles. Having tasted all that, experienced all that, been enlightened by all that, if they don't come all the way to faith but fall away, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance. They're damned.

There's another warning in chapter 10. This is the same, striking in its language. Verse 26, "If we go on sinning, it is the sin of unbelief in view, if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth..." How do you sin against the truth? By what? By not believing it. "If you go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer remaining a sacrifice for sin." There's no way then that you can be saved. All that is left, verse 27, is a certain terrifying expectation of judgment. If you do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is no other sacrifice for sin and all you can expect is the terrifying reality of judgment and the fury, verse 27, of a fire which will consume the adversaries. And then verse 29, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant by which He was sanctified and has insulted the Spirit of grace."

One thing to be ignorant, it's something else to know the truth and trample it. It's something else to be exposed in some way being superficially cleansed by the presence of that truth as an unbeliever in a

marriage is sanctified as God blesses the marriage. It's superficial, it's on the surface, but it's nonetheless an exposure to that. If you've had that exposure, and you insult the Spirit of grace, your punishment will be far worse than someone who never heard the truth. And verse 30 says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And verse 31 says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." There are few passages in Scripture that are more sobering and frightening than that. You are already in a dire situation. You are here tonight, the potential of your eternal punishment has been elevated to a level of severity beyond what it wouldn't have been if you'd never come. To reject the gospel now when you understand it, and you know it and you've heard it in the waters of baptism and from me, to reject that gospel now will bring upon you a severer damnation than if you had never heard. If you are a part of the church, if you have been exposed to the gospel, if you have experienced its transforming power in the lives of people around you and you will not receive the truth but defect from the truth, if you are an invader in the church, a hypocrite, a phony, if you are here for the purpose of attacking the faith, attacking the truth, and I'm not talking just about this congregation tonight, but anyone who ever hears this message who was associated with Christianity, you are elevating the agony of your eternity immensely. You will never be in the land of promise. You will never know heavenly bliss. And your hell will be far more horrific.

This is Jude's warning to the apostates. You've had the privilege of knowing the truth and you now face a severer doom. Have you ever asked yourself what makes people do this? Why do people defect? Why do they come all the way up to the truth and walk away?

I think Jesus helped us with that in the parable of the soils, don't you? He said there was a certain kind of ground that was hard. The seed went in. There was a spouting up of life. But when the sun came out, it was burned and died. This is persecution. Some people just don't want to pay the cost. They're just not willing to suffer for Christ, they're not willing to take up their cross and deny themselves. In some cases, as Jesus said, in the weedy ground, it's the love of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. In some cases, it's just hardened unbelief. But always it's the love of iniquity. And again I go back to what Jesus said in John 3, "Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are...what?...evil." So hold your sin all the way to hell, but if you're holding it under the hearing of the gospel, your hell will be severer in proportion to your exposure to the truth.

There is no stronger warning in Scripture. If you are in the church visible and not the church invisible, you fit into this category. If you've come all the way to the edge and by love of your iniquity will not abandon your sin and embrace Christ, you are virtually an apostate in the church. You may not have teaching influence, you may not have ministry influence. You may not be the bishop of anything, but you are virtual apostate, a defector from the faith you know to be true the power of which and the truth of which you've seen. We will contend for the true faith. We will proclaim the true faith against the insidious invasion of error in the church. But we also know that there are people in the church who are in the category of defecting from the faith to which they've been exposed who are not dangers to the church, but are deadly dangerous to themselves.

To the Israelites were given this immense privilege, to be led out of bondage like so many of you, all the way to the place where they experienced the power of God, the wonder of God, the might of God, the goodness of God, the grace of God. They saw God's ability to deliver. They saw God's ability to destroy in the drowning of the Egyptian army. And they were headed to a land of promise. But their faith in God was superficial and shallow and self-protecting and dishonoring and at the first disappointment in their little plans, they no longer trusted God. And they all died in the wilderness and never entered the promised land.

If you have been exposed to the truth, the promised land awaits you, the glory of heaven awaits you. This is not...this is not a false offer, it's a true offer if you will come all the way to faith in Christ, Christ alone and do not defect and join those apostates who do have influence, who have subtle influence and who are responsible for the corruption that occurs in the visible church.

Well, that's only one illustration out of three. But a sobering one. Next time we'll talk about the second illustration, equally startling illustration of the angels who apostatized as well. Pray with me.

We thank You, Lord, that one of the ways in which you demonstrate Your love to us is to warn us in language that is inescapably strong and firm and even frightening. We thank You for holding nothing back. We thank You for expressing what must be expressed. We thank You for the doctrine of hell. We thank You for the reality of hell. We thank You that You have, as it were, given us a glimpse of it. We thank You that You've shown us where we will go and the severity of the punishment that awaits us if knowing the truth we turn from it. We thank You for the mercy of warning and we ask, O God, that there would be a response to that, that out of fear and love for the One who gave His life for us, we would turn from our sins and embrace Christ, our only ark of safety through the waters of judgment, our only escape from the fires of torment. We grieve, our God, as we look at the visible church, those who name the name of Christ, who are apostate, defectors from the faith, liars, false teachers, corrupters, polluters because of whom the way of truth is maligned, agents of hell, and we will contend against their corruption of the truth about You and the truth about Christ and the truth about the gospel and the truth about sound doctrine, and the truth about holiness and morality and authority. But at the same time that we fight the war to protect the truth, we are very aware of the churches filled with people who on the surface appear not to be major threats to the church, but are in deadly danger, being cast into a torment of hell because they have rejected the truth themselves. And may we be eager and willing at all times as Hebrews 3 tells us to say to people, "Today and today, and today, and every day, day after day, harden not your hearts," as the people of Israel did in the day that they tested God and were shut out of the promised land. Lord, we have a responsibility to first believe and then to warn and we would be faithful to this. We thank You, Lord, that You have given us path through the midst of judgment into Your glorious presence by abandoning our sin and embracing Christ. I pray that Your Spirit would work that mighty miracle in our hearts. We pray for the sake of Christ. Amen.

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