

Apostasy 2: Analysis

Introduction

In my previous paper on apostasy I explained the serious problem of various types of falling away, which have proliferated in recent decades. I did this as a timely warning to the churches and the many actual examples proved how serious this matter is.

In this paper I want to explain more of the technicalities about apostasy since it seems that there is some confusion about this amongst the Lord's people.

What does apostasy mean?

English meaning

The New Oxford Dictionary definition is adequate: apostasy is the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief or principle. Its origin is a Middle English word stemming from the ecclesiastical Latin *apostasía*, from a late Greek alteration of Greek *apostasis* meaning 'defection'.

Synonyms for apostasy would therefore include: renunciation of belief, abandonment of belief, recantation; treachery, perfidy, faithlessness, disloyalty, betrayal, defection, desertion; heresy, rebellion to God, spiritual adultery, falling away, falling aside and sin.

NT Greek meaning

The word *apostasía* appears in the Greek NT in 2 Thess 2:3 where it is translated as 'falling away'.

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

This is Strong's number 646, *avpostasi*, a *apostasía* the feminine noun of the same word as 647 [*apostasion*, neuter, adjective]; it means: a falling away, defection, apostasy, rebellion, revolt, desertion. One lexicon adds, '*to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands - 'to rebel against, to revolt, to engage in insurrection, rebellion.'*¹

The word also appears in Acts 21:21 where it is translated, 'forsake'. In Koine Greek archaeological documents it is usually translated as 'rebel'. There are only two occurrences in the NT.

The Septuagint translation of Joshua 22:22 is *apostasía*, where it means rebellion:

The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knows, and let Israel itself know -- if *it is* in rebellion, or if in treachery against the LORD, do not save us this day.

Common usage

The usual translation used by commentators is 'falling away', which is a bit tame, but it equally means rebellion, defection, or desertion.

¹ Louw-Nida Lexicon.

In general church parlance, apostasy is often used to denote a permanent desertion from the Lord. A falling away that is temporary is often called 'backsliding', but I question this usage as confusing.

Warnings in the NT about apostasy where the word is not directly used

Angels

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Jude 1:6

The church

Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition. 2 Thess 2:3

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim 4:1-3

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *theirears* away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 2 Tim 4:3-4

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Heb 3:12

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame. Heb 6:4-6

For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay', says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people'. Heb 10:26-30

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 2 Pt 2:20-21

You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked. 2 Pt 3:17

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. 1 Jn 2:19

Backsliding

'Backsliding' is not a NT word; it does not appear in the Greek NT text, or even most English versions. Therefore, it is not a word sanctioned by the apostles. When Christians defect, they commit sin. Sin is rebellion; sin is apostasy. It is worse than the meaning usually given to backsliding, which can be viewed as somewhat minor.

Typically, modern Christians fail to call sin, 'sin' and instead use a more comfortable word. This is a mistake; we should always call sin, 'sin' and rebellion, 'rebellion'.

It has become common for Christians to use the word 'backsliding' for a sinful way of life that is considered as temporary (even though we cannot know it is only temporary), and to use the word 'apostasy' for what is considered as final (even though we cannot be sure it is final until the End). In my view this is a mistake; it is not an apostolic use of words. When a Christian sins habitually, he is falling away; if he repents, he has returned to the fold. If he never repents, then he is a total apostate that was never saved at all.

Apostasy is falling away, defection, rebellion; we cannot know whether this is final or not.

Deception means being led astray. When someone is deceived they have gone astray and are in the process of falling away. Deception leads to apostasy; but few consider this as important, believing that it is a minor problem. When people apostatise for sex, money, fame, riches and so on, they have been deceived (led astray) by those things.

When Christians speak of former church members that have deserted Christ and lived a sinful life for decades they still call them backsliders and not apostates. This is ridiculous. Only rarely does a person desert Christ for decades and eventually repent, though it does happen occasionally, and it is always hard for such a person. I have seen this only once. If someone rejects Christ, no matter how wonderful a church member they were once, and does so for many years, they are apostate. However, only at the End, on the Last Day, will we know their final condition.

OT usage

'Backsliding' and 'backslidings' appear multiple times in the OT² as applied to the sins of Israel. There are occasions when the word means full-blown apostasy that is irretrievable, and a sin that can be healed. The root word used means backsliding, turning back, apostate, recusant (rebel).³

I was tempted to list all the verses involved, but this would be unnecessarily tedious. Here are a few examples:

Backsliding that is permanent apostasy

Why has this people slidden back, [*shuwbi*] Jerusalem, in a perpetual backsliding? [*mashuwbaḥ*]
They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return. I listened and heard, *but* they do not speak aright.
No man repented of his wickedness. Jer 8:5-6

'Therefore a lion from the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the deserts shall destroy them; a leopard will watch over their cities. Everyone who goes out from there shall be torn in pieces, because their transgressions are many; their backslidings [*mashuwbaḥ*] have increased. How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery and assembled themselves by

² 'Backsliding' 12 times; 'backslidings' 4 times.

³ Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Lexicon.

troops in the harlots' houses. ... Shall I not punish them for these things?' says the LORD. 'And shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?' Jer 5:6-9

Backsliding that is temporary and can be healed

For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding [*showbab*] in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him. Isa 57:17-18

Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding [*mashuwbah*] Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I *am* merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever'. Jer 3:12

Return, you backsliding [*showbab*] children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Jer 3:22

I will heal their backsliding, [*mashuwbah*] I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. Hos 14:4

Since the word 'backsliding' can refer to both temporary and permanent rebellion from the Lord and is only used in the OT, it is not a useful term for Christians to use to apply to someone fallen into sin, even if they later repented. A more apostolic term is apostate; they have fallen away. Whether they eventually repent and return is unknown to us until it happens.

The fact is that Israel was a mixed people; it contained the elect remnant within it that had the Spirit of God but it also contained the majority of merely professing worshippers of God. 'Backsliding' in the OT is usually applied to the whole nation, a mixed congregation, and is not applicable to New Covenant believers.

Biblical examples of apostates

Saul

'I greatly regret that I have set up Saul *asking*, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. 1 Sam 15:11

Amaziah

Now it was so, after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up *to be* his gods, and bowed down before them and burned incense to them. Therefore the anger of the LORD was aroused against Amaziah. 2 Chron 25:14-15

After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD. 2 Chron 25:27

Judas

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Jn 17:12

From which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. Acts 1:25

Hymenaeus and Alexander

Having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1 Tim 1:19-20

Demas

Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica. 2
Tim 4:10

Israel

Israel is the classic case of an apostate. The frequent sin of the people was rebellion, forsaking the Lord, or spiritual adultery – following other pagan gods instead of Yahweh.

From the very beginning of the establishment of the nation at the Exodus, the people lusted after foreign gods and pagan pleasures of Egypt, culminating in the first great sin of worshipping the golden calf in the wilderness. Thus Moses constantly warned in speech and writing about the sin of deserting the Lord (e.g. Exod 20:3-4, 23; Deut 6:14, 11:16) and also note the curses pronounced on Mount Ebal (Deut 27:13-26, 28:15-68).

Joshua found it necessary to reaffirm the pledges of loyalty after the wilderness journeys before Israel could enter the promised land (Jos 24:1-28). Despite this, Israel soon rebelled and forgot the Lord leading to the terrible periods of subjugation in the time of the Judges for apostasy (Jud 2:11-15, 10:6, 10, 13; 1 Sam 12:10).

In the time of Solomon even the son of David led a paganising syncretism in Israel's worship. After Solomon, the Northern Kingdom monarchs never ceased to be disobedient. Judah had periods of revival but, on the whole, her kings became even more corrupt. Both halves of the nation were condemned to invasion and captivity. Gross examples of regal apostasy include: Rehoboam, (1 Kg 14:22-24; 2 Chron 12:1); Jeroboam (1 Kg 12:28-32); Ahab (1 Kg 16:30-33); Ahaziah (1 Kg 22:51-53); Jehoram (2 Chron 21:6, 10, 2 Chron 21:12-15); Ahaz (2 Chron 8:1-4); and Manasseh (2 Chron 33:1-9).

The stages of apostasy

It is rare that a former outwardly committed Christian fully apostatises all at once; there is usually a slow descent from obedience to Christ to full-blown rebellion. In some of the cases I illustrated in my previous paper, a gradual deterioration is apparent in their demise.

Sometime four stages can be observed:

Looking back

Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. Lk 9:62

Believers must always look toward Jesus; they must continually focus upon Christ as the source of their strength and life. The Christian life is nothing but a dependence upon God. As we were saved by grace, we continue in grace.

Those who look back are in great danger because they have stopped looking at Christ. If you ignore the source of your life you will atrophy very quickly. The Israelites that later fell in the wilderness continually demonstrated this looking back. Despite the miracles that God provided, they kept harping on longingly about leeks and onions they enjoyed in Egypt. 'We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!' (Num 11:5-6). From longing for Egyptian food, they later followed pagan gods.

But the best example of the dangers of looking back is Lot's wife, and she is given to us for this very reason. Though she had left Sodom outwardly, Sodom had not left her and she longed for the pleasures of the big city. Her turning back led to her suffering terrible judgment.

Drawing back

'Now the just shall live by faith; but if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him'. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Heb 10:38-39

Drawing back [*hupostello*] means to timidly withdraw, shrink, timid hesitation, and to shrink from declaring. It is not yet a desertion, but it is a timid hesitation from fully obeying God's commands.

This is when a person feels that properly following the requirements of Christ is too much for them and they equivocate. It is the beginning of a fall.

Turning back

From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Jn 6:66

This is a departure, but it is not yet full flight or total desertion. It is when various things cause the Christian to stumble: some doctrine confuses them and they cannot cope; some task is deemed to difficult; some suffering causes them to doubt God; some fleshly sins become very attractive. It is when the path that God has taken you on becomes too narrow and difficult and you turn back. You are still on the path but you have turned around and are no longer facing Christ.

Falling back

That they might go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and caught. Isa 28:13

This is mature apostasy. It is finally deserting the Lord as your Saviour and only hope. Sometimes this is a formal, complete rejection of Christ as God and Saviour; a person committing this sin has no hope but hell. Sometimes it is ignoring him and walking away from him; perhaps not a full rejection but deciding to enjoy the world and its sin and disobeying Christ; perhaps such a person could later repent. Either way, this person is no longer on God's path at all; he is lost.

The verse in Isaiah refers principally to Israel. It goes on to warn about the stone of stumbling that would break them for rejection of Christ as the Messiah. Jesus referred to this when he said that the Jews would be crushed (Matt 21:42-44).⁴ The final end of Israel was total apostasy from God after many apostasies and returns.

Repenting apostates

Sometimes a person turns away from God and commits sin for a period of time but then returns to the Lord.

I have recently heard of a well-known Baptist pastor who was finally exposed as having committed adultery for years and had to resign from his ministry. The exposure forced a crisis. He determined to fix his marriage and repented openly, expressing, what seems to be, true contrition. He left the church and the area and is trying to restore his marriage and

⁴ Regarding Israel, all those who rejected Christ were crushed but those who accepted Christ as the Messiah, the remnant, were saved and formed the early church.

be a member of a different church. This is an example of a repenting apostate. He fell away, deserted Christ's commands, lived a lie and then repented.

This is not the normal picture of an apostate since he continued to preach, continued to be a pastor and didn't openly reject Christ for years – but he was an apostate in his heart. Everything he did in the church in that time was flawed and not of God because it came from sin.

How then do we view repentant apostates? Can they return to ministry? If so how long must they wait? What if they got divorced and married another?

These are all difficult questions that cannot have simple answers. Each case has to be viewed on its merits and determined by local elders.

However, in my view serious cases cannot admit a return to ministry. Indeed, there have been historic cases where sinful leaders have repented, been allowed back into ministry and then apostatised again, only worse.

For example: a Charismatic supposed prophet seriously deceived the Charismatic churches for decades during the Signs and Wonder Movement. As well as his truly appalling, heretical teaching, he was a secret alcoholic and a homosexual. He did everything to hide this and pretended he was a great man of God. When he was finally exposed he was taken aside by other erroneous church leaders and looked after. Within a few years he was gradually been allowed back into ministry under the direction of others. I view this as a mistake.

Such a man who wilfully deceived the churches year after year, and was paid a salary to do so, is a man that cannot be trusted. Initial exposures were denied. Multiple times he lied about his sins and at the same time condemned others (usually good people). Elders that have the responsibility for the Lord's people should not take a chance with such a sinful person, whose very repentance cannot be trusted. As for considering him to be a great prophet of God who made a temporary mistake, that is just farcical.

There are also multiple historic cases of pastors who committed adultery, fornicated (frequented prostitutes), or were alcoholics, that repented of a minor infringement but went on to continue the sin in secret for years; sometimes until their deaths. More than one pastor died of alcohol-caused sclerosis of the liver.

In the case of the adulterous pastor who was contrite, I believe that if he continues to be faithful to the Lord and his wife for several years, and if he has a genuine teaching gift then he may possibly be considered for ministry in the church again, but only local elders that know him well should decide on this.

The difference between sins and apostasy

Now we all sin all the time. None of us is perfect:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1 Jn 1:8

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. 1 Jn 1:10

What *is* man, that he could be pure? Job 15:14

In Your sight no one living is righteous. Ps 143:2

For *there is* not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Eccles 7:20

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way. Isa 53:6

For we all stumble ['err' or 'sin'] in many things. Jm 3:2

It is important that we always see ourselves as sinners saved by grace alone. We must always be utterly dependent upon Christ, every day. It is by grace that we stand. Even at the End we will all say that we are unprofitable servants.⁵

Those who teach that this is wrong, negative and that Christians should never consider themselves as guilty ever, and must live in constant victory, are antinomians. They are lying. Even Peter stood condemned and publicly guilty when he behaved badly.⁶ Perfectionist doctrines are unbiblical and erroneous, and there are many forms of perfectionism.

When you sin, you are to be condemned and must confess and repent to receive forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9). The comfort that there is no condemnation (Rm 8:1) is for those who are in Christ Jesus. During this life today, this means those who are walking in the new nature (in Christ, being in the Spirit). There is no forgiveness for the old nature, which will be eventually destroyed. When you put on the old nature, you stand condemned because it is sinful and continues to grow in sin (Eph 4:22).

So, we all sin and have the propensity to sin if we put on the old nature. Are we apostates?

No we are not. Apostasy is falling away, falling aside, defecting from Christ. When we sin momentarily and then immediately confess it and mourn for it, we have stayed trusting in Christ, even to forgive our sin moments ago. We never defected, we just made a mistake and were stupid children. We didn't stop loving and trusting our Heavenly Father.

This is why sin must be dealt with quickly. Children make mistakes and must readily admit them to their Father. It is the children that hide their mistakes and continually disobey their Father that apostatise.

It is a matter of what you love more. Apostates love their sin more than God and follow their sin away from God. Sinning children love their Father but make the occasional mistakes and immediately seek their father's forgiveness. This is the difference between sins and apostasy.

How does this doctrine impact assurance?

Some people have been taught that once a person is converted they can never fall away. Some use the phrase, '*once saved, always saved*'. The problem with this is that we do not know the hearts of people and whether they are truly saved or not. Indeed, it is clear that many people, including famous leaders, have put on a good show of being exemplary men until they apostatised for good and never repented.

The appearances of a conversion may be superficial. It means nothing that a person raised a hand in a Gospel meeting, or stood up, or went to the front, or prayed a prayer dictated by someone, or was assured by someone that they were saved. None of these things count

⁵ Lk 17:10 'So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do".'

⁶ Gal 2:11 'Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed [condemned]'.

for anything at all. Now someone may well be saved and do such things but they may not be saved. What counts is genuine faith in Christ and submission or yielding to God shown in true repentance.

The doctrines of assurance and perseverance are absolutely true and Biblical. The elect will always persevere and can be assured of this even in this life. The real issue is whether people are truly elect or not.

The reality is that our actual perseverance proves our election. The fact that we continue following the Lord year after year proves that we are elect. But we must always continue in this perseverance and should question ourselves. The prophets and apostles mention this several times (Ps 26:2; Lam 3:40; Hag 1:5, 7; 1 Cor 11:28, 31; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 6:4; 1 Jn 3:20-21). It is those who take their salvation for granted and do not persevere that are in great danger. Thus the true elect will pray, will read their Bible, will seek to do good, will testify to Jesus, will cherish the Lord's people, will mourn for sins, and so on. Those who care nothing about these things are in great danger.

Only you know whether you are elect; I do not. The truly elect person will know assurance in his heart and will demonstrate that election in his life by his testimony to Jesus. You can have real assurance that you are saved, but I cannot have assurance that you are; I can only see your good works proving your faith; unless you apostatise.

Can the elect fall away? No they cannot; they will persevere and be found safe at the end by God's grace.

Can those who say they are converted fall away? Yes they can; unless they are truly in Christ.

The guarantee of salvation

The proof that you are saved is evidenced by your perseverance but it is not caused by it. The cause of assurance is not human works of any kind. It is the Holy Spirit who guarantees that we are chosen and saved eternally.

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. 2 Cor 1:21-22

He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So *we are* always confident. 2 Cor 5:5-6

In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:13-14

God has 'given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee'; what could be clearer. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a seal of salvation; we are sealed as belonging to God; we are his property. Those who have the Holy Spirit are sealed possessions of God that no one can touch. Surely this is clear, 'you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance'.

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 1 Jn 4:12

He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself. 1 Jn 5:10

Sadly, Reformed folk have often played down the work of the Holy Spirit and this is a big mistake. The denominations that most ignored the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers are the same churches that are plagued with problems about assurance.⁷ Historically, people who lacked assurance were badly taught about the work of the Spirit.

Today, with the chaos of Charismatic doctrines and practices, many Reformed churches are again scared to teach the work of the Holy Spirit properly. Thus, even today, there are many people who lack assurance.

The Spirit's work, amongst other things, is to guarantee your salvation. He confirms to us that we are children of God.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Rm 8:16

You must not dismiss this verse as being mystical; it is not. It means what it says. We have a human spirit as well as a soul (emotions, will, mind) and the Holy Spirit testifies directly to our spirit, bypassing the soul, that we are saved. Thus assurance is not an intellectual thing (you can't convince yourself of salvation with facts); it is not an emotional thing (you don't feel that you are saved); it is not volitional (you don't decide that you are saved); it is a spiritual assurance in the heart and spirit.⁸

You cannot continue in the Christian life properly unless you are constantly being filled with the Spirit, 'be filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18). The tense of the verb 'be filled' is a present passive imperative, which has the sense of continuation; thus 'be being filled'; i.e. be continually filled. Many Reformed folk simply have no understanding about this at all.

You must continue to be filled with the Spirit. Thus pray daily to be filled with the Spirit and experience, as the apostles did, filling after filling.⁹ The more you experience the Spirit, the more you will be assured.

The apostles knew when someone was filled with the Spirit and when he was not. They chose people for leadership on the basis of whether they were full of the Spirit. The early church knew what it was to be filled with the Spirit and this is the secret of its success. Remember that Jesus encouraged the disciples that he would not leave them alone but would send the Spirit to continue his work amongst them, guiding, leading and glorifying Jesus. The Spirit brings the presence of Christ to his people and this is our assurance.

Charismatic errors

You must understand that the entire teaching of Charismatics and Pentecostals regarding the baptism in the Spirit is a satanic lie to stop Christians from being continually filled with the Spirit. This false doctrine makes the Christian experience of the Spirit chiefly a single mystical experience, which is occult and mystical in nature. Charismatics then look back to this wonderful past experience as if that is all there is.

⁷ Most notably Strict Baptists.

⁸ The heart and the human spirit are directly connected.

⁹ Acts 2:4 'And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit'. Acts 4:8 'Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit'. Acts 4:31 'And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit'. Acts 6:3 "'Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit'. Acts 7:55 'he, being full of the Holy Spirit'. Acts 11:24 'he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith'. Acts 13:9 'Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit'. Acts 13:52 'The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit'. Etc.

Such a mystical experience is very common amongst occult groups with initiation rituals having the same effects (tongues, emotional experiences, and exotic phenomena).

By claiming to have this experience, such folk see no need (or rarely do) for a daily filling of the Holy Spirit and have little understanding about the sealing of the Spirit as our guarantee.

Some proofs that a person is elect from John's first letter

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to* believe in the name of the Son of God. 1 Jn 5:13

The purpose of 1 John is to confirm assurance to true believers so that they can walk in confidence and victory.

Faith in Christ

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. 1 Jn 5:1

Confessing Christ in life

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 1 Jn 4:15

Repentance is part of this confession; it is an outward life of conformity to Christ. Our life confesses Christ. It is more than a once for all verbal confession.

Obedying God's commandments

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 1 Jn 5:2

John mentions this several times and in this he was copying his master because the Lord repeatedly told his disciples to obey his commandments. Thus all those leaders who say that we can ignore God's law are liars and antinomians. If God's law and the Law of Christ¹⁰ are not important to you, then it is unlikely that you are truly saved.¹¹

Confession of sin and contrition

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *oursins* and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn 1:7-9

Only perfectionists believe that Christians can never sin; it is a heresy never taught anywhere in Scripture. The fact is that we all sin. The way we deal with this is a sign of a true believer.

The true believer hates sin. When he sins he mourns and grieves about it because he has dishonoured his Lord and Master (Ps 51:4). In true contrition for even a minor sin, he confesses it to God readily. God then, for the sake of the blood of Christ, forgives the sin. Fellowship with God is far more important to them than mollifying guilt; they want to see God smile on them.

¹⁰ Gal 6:2 'fulfil the law of Christ'.

¹¹ For detailed information on how we are dead to the law and how we obey the law see my paper, 'The Believer's Relationship to the Law'.

This is a sign of genuine Christians – they hate their own sin and suffer for it, even with groans (c.f. Ps 40:12). Christians do not enjoy sin and perpetuate it, trying to hide it from God.¹²

Obeying and honouring apostolic teaching

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. 1 Jn 4:6

It is shocking today to see many sections of the church deliberately avoid apostolic teaching or even reading the NT. Many who follow Jewish Root teachings fall for this lie. The apostolic testimony is the final words of Jesus to the church, as he foretold; the NT is vital to understand the whole Bible and qualifies previous revelation.

Walking in righteousness

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 1 Jn 1:6

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. 1 Jn 3:10

Overcoming the world

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith. 1 Jn 5:4

Loving the brethren

If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. 1 Jn 4:10

If someone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 1 Jn 4:17

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. 1 Jn 5:1

Growth and progress

The true believer grows in grace; this progress never stops and there is a continual development of understanding about God and his truth. Now for some this growth may be imperceptible but over time, even for such a one, there is true growth. For others there is a development in understanding almost daily and their growth is rapid and strong. Neither is more well founded than the other, it is just that they have different gifts and abilities. What is important is growth, not spurts of it.

What is of concern is a lack of growth. If a supposed believer shows no signs of growth whatsoever, even over a long period of time, then there is cause for concern. Those in the vine will bear fruit and the fruit will remain.

Conclusion

Apostasy is falling away from Christ and this sin takes many forms. It is serious and not to be taken lightly.

¹² Notably, professing Christians that may be contrite do not go to God in confession, but either make excuses for their sins or increase their church duties as if to merit some remission of guilt.

Backsliding is not a NT term and never used by the apostles; as such it is not a suitable word for us to use today.

Falling away is deserting Christ; it is an act of rebellion. Sometimes that apostasy is full-blown, such as when someone rejects the Lord and lives a secular life in the world. However, sometimes the apostasy is hidden and a sinful person continues in church ministry pretending to be godly. This is still apostasy; for example, a sinning adulterous pastor continuing to minister is an apostate. They fell away in their heart and lived a sinful life, even though others never knew.

The reality of apostasy all around us today should make us determined to keep ourselves in the love of God and to flee to God as our only refuge and hope. In the end, our continued perseverance proves that we are elect.

However, perseverance does not cause assurance; it merely proves it. The cause of our assurance of salvation is the Holy Spirit who witnesses in our spirit and hearts that we are the children of God. We should be filled with the Spirit all the time to avoid apostasy.

Sin is rebellion and not even the smallest sins must be allowed to continue without contrition, mourning, and confession. It is when sin is delighted in and hidden in our heart that we are in danger of falling away. Always take your sins to God in confession at the earliest opportunity; never wait to confess; never put off repenting and determining to follow God faithfully.

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