

Apostasy

Introduction

I write this with a heavy heart. I need to talk about apostasy because it is so rampant in these modern times. I have seen so many people fall away over the years, but worse, many of these have been the most arduous believers. I have seen some of the most godly, zealous, courageous church leaders completely apostatise. They did not just walk away from brethren, or put down ministry; they walked away from Jesus. This I cannot understand.

I can understand people quitting ministry; especially when they had worked really hard for many years and received little recognition. I can understand folk abandoning leadership pressures when they had been targeted with vitriol, anger, abuses and even death threats. I can even understand that people can walk away from church life for certain reasons due to despondency. What I can't understand is how any previously godly church leader can walk away from the Lord.

Why did they do this?

Sexual gratification

Incredibly I have seen people abandon God for a host of earthly things. They have become focused upon a woman, left their family and took off in a flight of sexual revitalisation. I have seen leader's wives abandon husband and children and run away with a man. I have seen three women run away with another woman. I have seen a male church leader abandon family and go and live with a man. I have seen a church leader run off with another leader's wife. I have even seen one pastor commit multiple adultery with most of the women in his flock.

Sex appears to be a common temptation targeting church leaders. It is common that the leader, being in a position of social power, is an attractive quality to certain young women. When that leader is a little older, say over 30 or so, having some young woman throw herself at you is a temptation hard to avoid; but it must be avoided. In the end the attraction is pride; when a marriage has settled into a routine, or even a rut, suddenly having the gratification of the sensuality of youth creates a lust for manly pride, as well as the pleasures of the flesh. I have seen young men, middle-aged men and older men commit this sin.

In all these cases, the men cannot have known the complete satisfaction of being in a relationship with the Lord; they just cannot. Being devoted to Christ has a satisfaction all of its own which is far beyond what any sexual adventure can offer. We are called to have a love relationship with God and commune with the Father through Jesus by the Spirit. We are called to share in the most powerful, eternal love community in the universe – sharing in the love relationship that exists in the Trinitarian Godhead. What greater love can there be?

These men that committed adultery and fornication were not satisfied with God in Christ and this has to flag up the fear that they never knew the Lord at all.

In addition, these men could never have really loved their wives. Far too many Christian marriages are a sham where sacrificial, committed love was never in the frame. Sure marriage is tough, but genuine Christian husbands commit themselves before God to their wife and this vow means something. Continuing and strengthening the marriage is an act of service to God as well as a commitment to the wife.

They just gave up

In many cases people abandoned the faith because they just collapsed under pressure.

To be fair, I have seen some people undergo tremendous pressure; but this is not the point. God promises to keep us on track and no test is beyond what we can handle with grace. I also know of folk that have had to endure the most incredible stress and suffering and yet continue to be full of zeal for God. I have known people live in constant, acute, chronic pain, calling out for healing that never comes, and still be faithful to God. I have known individuals suffer low-level, continual, psychological stress and betrayal for decades and still remain faithful. I have friends who live with a chronic, debilitating or disabling condition who are great witnesses to God. There is no human reason to give up on God.

In one case that I knew, a leader gave up on God because his medical condition was very bad and then his wife left him. What I don't understand is why he thought that abandoning his faith, his only sure support, would help him endure the stresses of life. Apostatising was not going to heal his condition, or alleviate his suffering and neither would it fix his broken heart. Why did he give up? Furthermore, I have known people with far worse medical conditions that did not give up.

In such cases it can only be that the pressure they faced merely brought to the surface the fact that they were never true Christians; the heat of the sun scorched the seed amongst stones (Matt 13:5-6, 20-21).

They blamed God for something

I have seen many people apostatise because something bad happened in their life and they blamed God.

Now I am not going to excuse God for the fact that he allows bad things to happen to us; he does and that is just a fact. However, that is not the point.

God is in charge of everything, and everything that happens to us comes from the hand of God and was predetermined in eternity for a purpose. The sovereignty of God is a much-denied doctrine today but it is at the heart of Scripture. God is not just sovereign in grace and salvation, he is sovereign over everything. I will not take time to prove this as I have written on the matter many times.

That God allows bad things to happen is a fact; the issue is, how do we react to those things? Our reaction is what proves whether we are believers or not. The whole point of the story of Job is to show that God controls the bad things that happen to us but that our reaction must be that God is our redeemer and in complete control; we must submit to his will. He does all things for a good reason, even if we cannot understand it. If we trust him through bad times, he will strengthen our faith and the witness glorifies him.

Now things that can really shake us include: someone close to us dying unexpectedly, someone close betraying us, rejection, suffering, chronic sickness, afflictions, multiple practical problems, and persecution. Such things have assailed the saints of God throughout history but in the past believers were more able to accept such things and trust

God. The shocking poverty of doctrine in the churches today results in believers being unprepared for such life shocks, and many thus apostatise.

The bottom line is that anyone blaming God for bad things and then abandoning his faith merely proves that they never knew God at all.

[Aside: to add weight to this I will say that I have been in a bad state of suffering for many years. I am suffering from multiple serious medical conditions, some of which could kill me at any time; they gradually worsen. The resultant symptoms make my life wretched in multiple ways. Day and night I suffer. I am only able to eat a few food items and meals are a big problem. I am on drugs that have bad side effects but without them I would already be dead. I had to stop driving some years ago and now I am isolated some miles from town. Public transport and walking are out so it is either taxis or being a recluse. I am mostly a recluse. I have many friends but they are very distant; some I see once a year 200 miles away. On top of this I have experienced the most terrible rejections and betrayals; but I will not develop this. Let's just say that those I have helped and cherished have betrayed me by the score, mainly because of the truths I proclaim. On a daily basis I have no help and no support. Furthermore, almost all my close family is distant from me and many are suffering multiple serious medical conditions as well. In addition I have been attacked, persecuted, reviled, slandered and libelled – usually by supposed Christians. I could add more problems but this is more than enough. Is God in control of all these? Yes he is. Do I feel angry toward God? No I don't. Do I accept them? Yes and no. I accept them as from God's hand but I pray for healing and support and then fight those I can fight and do what I can. I don't give up (though tempted to) and I praise God in my suffering. In fact doctors are shocked that I am able to continue as I am. I continue to hope for some measure of healing so that I can do more work to serve the Lord. However, I very nearly died seven years ago and all the work I have done since then is a bonus in my mind. The point here is that I have many earthly reasons to blame God and give up but what is the point of that? God is my support; God is my help; God is my defence; God is the lifter of my head. Why would I abandon my only true helper? There is never any reason to desert God – none at all.]

They became dejected by church life

In some sad cases I have seen a really good brother, often a church leader, who was dealt a bad blow by the church in some way. Such blows vary from place to place, but a massive dejection follows in its wake.

Sometimes it is an offence caused by a senior leader. Sometimes it is that a congregation ceases to support him properly. Sometimes it is an offence or a challenge coming from another church member. Sometimes is a betrayal of some kind, either in person, or in writing, or by rumour. Sometimes it is lies spread abroad to undermine him.

Often such situations lead to a person severely questioning what he is doing and why he is doing it. Why carry on working so hard if this is how you are treated?

All I can say about this is you should have expected this, as Jesus warned us. Even the apostle Paul had to face challenges from churches that he had planted. Pagans that owed their very souls to him sometimes later turned against him. At one point Paul could say, 'all those in Asia have turned away from me', (2 Tim 1:15). This was a reversal of the earlier success where, 'throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded ... many people', (Acts 19:26).

No matter how perfect a church situation appears to be, there will come a time when betrayal, stress and chaos will come. This is just an observable fact and we see it in the NT. Leaders best be prepared for this and you are very fortunate if it never happens to you; give thanks to God.

The point of serving the church is not the benefits that come from the church, such as admiration and support, but serving the Lord God. If you set your sights lower than the Lord, you will be disappointed and finally dejected.

They were attracted to the world

The most superficial reason that people leave the church and reject God is the pleasure of the world. This is the seed swallowed by thorns (Matt 13:7, 22).

I just do not see the attraction here at all. What in the world is so attractive that you abandon Christ who gave his life to save you from eternal hell? I simply cannot understand this.

The only explanation for church leaders to be deceived by the world's pleasures is that they were never Christians in the first place.

They loved money

This follows on from world-lovers. This is the lowest reason for apostatising.

Sure there have been many church leaders that struggled with money. This is nothing new. Why go into this calling if you wanted more money? However, today church leaders are paid very much more than they used to be when I was converted. How folk can be tempted by money when they have a decent middle-class life is beyond me.

Such deserters cannot ever have been a genuine believer.

Addictions

More than one powerful preacher and church leader has succumbed to the perils of drink. There have been some very famous preachers and well-known writers that eventually gave in to the power of alcohol.

How people who taught the flock of the beauty of Christ and the glories of the New Covenant could go astray for the sake of something so superficial as drink is completely beyond me.

They were frustrated artists

Though this is less common, there have been a number of people in the limelight in Christian circles that have abandoned the faith in order to pursue a career in art, music, drama or journalism.

Sometimes the people doing this are so called worship musicians and worship leaders in Charismatic churches. These get a taste of the sort of fame usually afforded to rock musicians; they perform on stage and like it. Before long they are performing as Christian rock artists, making records, but eventually they abandon the church and become full-fledged rock stars. Actually, they try to be stars but, in fact, most of such people end up as failed rock stars. They trade the church for the world and end up with nothing. Ridiculous.

Then there are a few others who don't seek stardom per se, but abandon church ministry to be a musician, songwriter, performer and recording artists. Sadly, one of my friends fell by this means. Sometimes it happens late in life and the person feels that they have been left behind and regret not taking up music as a teenager. This is often just old men dreaming foolish dreams and trying to be kids; or worse, thinking that their art is something special and worth apostasy.

Oddly I came the other route. I started off as an artist and musician but was later converted. Fortunately, I had seen enough of the music business to know what it was like and I rejected it even before I was saved. Though I am still a musician, I never had a desire to be some rock star because it is meaningless and that world is filled with iniquity.

Fundamentally, this is another form of deserting Christ for the world's pleasures. It beggars belief that they could jettison salvation for the tit-bit of music or some other art form. Again, if this desertion continues without repentance, it means that the person was never saved.

Following some 'ism'

Sadly, this strikes young people the most and especially teenagers attending college and university.

Children that have grown up in a Christian home often go to college and come back as unbelievers. The sheer statistics of this in America are staggering. Most further education kids apostatise.

Firstly, the person is subjected to an attack on their basic principles of belief. Often the theory of evolution is used to do this coupled with modernism and secularism or even post-modernism. Struggling against peer pressure, cracks begin to appear. The person is then subjected to powerful assaults by people claiming that such and such a philosophy, trend or social action, is far superior to the fuddy-duddy, old-fashioned, dusty, Christianity they used to espouse. The sorts of isms that folk grab on to include feminism, socialism, philosophy, communism, scientism and such like. Sadly a young person I care about has shed Christianity and adopted feminism after attending university.

Sometimes it is not a human philosophy that defeats them but a demonical spiritual one. This is when the teenager abandons Christianity in order to become a Scientologist, a Jehovah's Witness, a Muslim, a Hindu, a witch, a mystic or some other religion. This is less common but it occasionally occurs.

One can only hope that this backsliding is a temporary affair, even if it lasts some years.

Power

The last thing that I can think of is the lust for power. Some church leaders, having a position of petty power over a few people, get a lust for authority and seek to be in greater control. They convince themselves that having more authority will serve God and like to give themselves imposing titles. So far this is very common in the church and it is a sin, but not yet apostasy.

When leaders do this they turn a church into a cult; a rogue group that adheres to an elitist, authoritarian figure. Sadly some go even further and increase the level of totalitarianism. This is when leaders abandon the Lord and become evil dictators over people. Amazingly, such people often stay with the leader. The worst case in recent history (though there have been many in previous history) was the Jonestown massacre. A church leader (Jim Jones) developed into a cultist, then a dictator of a commune and then a supervisor of mass suicide.

The end result of a lust for power is always destruction of some kind. Power is dangerous in the church and that is why God ordained leadership by a team of equal elders with no dominating minister.

Sadly, many church leaders have apostatised as a result of desiring power.

Examples

I will not name names here, nor even give any clues. Most of these folk you will never have heard of anyway. I give these examples as they help us to understand the depth of this problem.

A godly leader

The most godly brother that I ever worked with was a humble church leader. Together we led a church of 2-300 in a large town (now a city); he was full-time, I was working. Together we developed church strategy, prayed and cried together, counselled together, shared ministry, and loved each other deeply. There were other co-leaders but this man and I did most of the work, set the strategy and performed most of the public ministry.

This young man was one of the most humble that I ever met. He was truly zealous for the Lord and very winsome. He was so empathetic that he would sometimes cry in a sermon. He would work sacrificially and was greatly loved by all. He was strong in the word and a true worshipper of God. He was a man earmarked for great things.

Some time after I left this work, because I believed that it had gone astray, he first suffered a breakdown and then left the ministry but continued to work in the church office. Gradually I lost contact with him as he withdrew from me. Deep down I knew that he was in turmoil because he knew that the church was wrong but his life was mixed up in it; he had a family and a mortgage that needed support. He stopped going to church meetings and met with a local discussion group of church folk.

I later learned that he had abandoned the faith completely, left the church, took up a management consultancy position and ceased all Christian activity. When I learned this I discovered where he was living and sent him a warm, but concerned email. He responded warmly but said that he was now happy and had no desire whatsoever to return to any church.

I was shocked and saddened. That he is backsliding is certain; but if he never repents from this sin of rejecting the Lord, it means that he was never saved in the first place. This is a grave warning to those folk who chose church leaders.

A powerful teacher

One of the most powerful teachers that I ever heard was this pastor of a local church. His depth of understanding was impressive and he gave the best series of talks on Revelation that I have ever heard. I have to admit that he was a very important influence in my life when I was a young Christian. Yet the man had some very serious flaws that we were not originally aware of.

In time I planted a separate church (much to his annoyance), which God blessed, and I had less contact with him. Several years later I discovered that the church he led had collapsed. He had committed multiple adultery, on a continual basis until discovered, with many ladies in his flock, betraying the husbands that had trusted him. Some had even relocated hundreds of miles to be in his church. Even his associate elder was betrayed. I never got to find out the depth of the mess that he had created, which became a local scandal.

How a man could do this when my first contact with him was a brilliant talk on the unsearchable riches of Christ, I will never know.

It is hard to see how such sin, still unrepented of decades later, could be committed by a genuine believer. There are limits to what backsliding means. Yet how could an unbeliever preach so effectively on the Lord? I am not capable of answering that question.

A nationally respected preacher

This man was a well-known church leader in a university city, whose ministry was desired by many. He spoke at Calvinistic conferences and seminars; he wrote books and his counsel was highly regarded by national leaders. He was known as an intellectual light and his preaching had much more depth than many of his contemporaries.

Then all of a sudden, this man resigned from his leadership, left the church, abandoned his wife and children and shacked up with another man. He said that he had lived a lie and was now an open homosexual. The church world reeled in shock.

Amazingly, despite all his intellectual knowledge of the faith, he averred that he was now happier than ever. How he can be happier when he knows the facts about hell, judgment and condemnation I will never know. Again this can only mean that he was never a true believer, despite all his academic credentials and his church popularity.

A decent elder

A good friend of mine was a very decent man and an elder of a local church. He and his wife would often share meals with my wife and me and we were friends for years. He was also studious in Bible research, but did struggle with some doctrinal issues.

One day he just up and left his wife. They were not rancorous with each other, they didn't row, there was no major break-up melodrama; he just decided to leave. He was honourable in the break up and his wife had a house while he rented a flat. In this time he left the church and abandoned his faith. In due course he married someone else and I gradually lost contact with him.

When I knew him well, he was the last person I would have thought would leave his wife.

A typical zealous believer

This person was a zealous young church member who grew up in church and was very active within it. He was also a musician and had been a junior church evangelist. He was responsible, worked hard in a technical job and had a lovely family.

After many years his wife left him and this hit him very hard (as to be expected). Shortly after this he began to drift from his beliefs. Within a few years he had quit church, abandoned his faith and left his job. He studied for a year in some New Age type of counselling qualification course and became one of the many mystical counsellors that we are plagued with, promising a fulfilled life to clients.

In discussion with him his apostasy was very severe. He had completely abandoned all his Christian roots. He considered that church was rubbish and worst of all affirmed that the stories about Jesus were only myths. He was aggressive in his defence of his New Age ideas and very critical of Christianity.

One can only hope that he will turn and repent and be saved; if not his future is bleak.

A former youth leader

This man was a typical good guy that was active in church for decades. As a youth he was a team-leader involved in evangelism and other projects. He was a senior manager in his

work and had a lovely wife and family. He was the typical backbone of church life and prosperous.

Over time he drifted away from his core beliefs and started to fail to attend church meetings. In time he, instead, met with some other discontents from the church in a weekly discussion group. Over time this discussion group turned from religious subjects to philosophical ones and gradually this man lost his faith entirely.

To the dismay of his wife, he drifted further and further away from the truth becoming an ardent defender of philosophy and critic of religion. After a few more years he left his lovely wife and his large house. He also left his prosperous job and became some kind of woolly leadership consultant.

This has continued some years now and it appears that his defection is complete. All the promise that he showed for decades came to nothing.

A pastor and watchman

This man was a highly respected pastor-teacher. He came to fame as one of the few, clear voices condemning the Toronto Blessing and his sermons and writings made him famous. I was already reading his magazine at that time. He even produced a very fine book on the occult entering the church.

He was badly treated by the UK Reformed religious establishment and left his English pastorate. Meanwhile subscribers to his emails and teaching papers skyrocketed. He then went to an overseas church and successfully pastored this flock, continuing to write intelligent, helpful, provocative papers and speak at an occasional conference. Again the religious establishment ganged up on him and he was forced out of his pastorate and treated wickedly. A hearing later exonerated him.

Again he went to another country but this time set himself up as an independent commentator and teacher, reaching out over the Internet and supporting himself as best he could with occasional jobs and donations. His fame spread even further and his papers became more provocative, taking on some sensitive religious white elephants.¹

The religious community in general took umbrage about the citadels he demolished with great skill and he was subject to constant attack. These attacks included abuse, slanders, libels and even death threats. At one point he was even followed and watched at home. His family was threatened.

The continual attacks, threats and slanders gradually dragged him down to the point where he decided to close his ministry and seek secular employment. His choice of employment (singer-songwriter) led to the UK Reformed establishment launching a crusade against him, filling the religious world with rumours, slanders and lies. I launched into a strong defence of his at this time and castigated one famous church leader in writing and on the 'phone.

Though I was worried about him, he was, at this time, still strong in his faith and had the support of his wife and children. However, probably through the mental exhaustion of constant carping, he gradually withdrew from his supporters and stopped correspondence; I guess he wanted a new life and he enjoyed the work he was now doing.

¹ Something that is useless or troublesome, especially one that is expensive to maintain or difficult to dispose of.

At this point all his friends and supporters lost contact with him for years.

Then his new website, advertising his work as a singer, came to light, which proved to be shocking. Statements on this website proved categorically that he had abandoned his faith and was completely in the world. There were also hints that he had left his wife, but I can't really confirm this. His song lyrics were foul and full of lurid, lewd comments. In addition he appeared to be trying to live the life of a folk-rock, pop star, re-living a lost childhood, with all the superficialities that goes with it.

As a result of decades of attacks by supposed Christians, this man was badly damaged and eventually gave up; not only on the church but also, it seems, on God.

Now he is clearly backsliding and he may be shocked at some point into repenting. However, if he does not repent, this means that he was never a Christian at all and his ministry was merely intellectual. Let's hope that he does repent.

How apostate leaders covered their situation up

It is an observable fact that many apostate leaders continue in sin for a long time before their problems are widely known. It is common that an apostate leader will be in a sinful situation, perhaps even denying the Lord, for years before something brings the matter to light. I have known leaders commit adultery for several years before being exposed. I have known leaders be alcoholics or homosexuals for decades before being exposed. How do leaders manage to cover their sins?

Niceness

Very often a leader, especially winsome, attractive young leaders, are extremely pleasant people. Their very niceness becomes a cloak for all manner of sins.

This is one reason why the question of being nice needs to be addressed by believers. Niceness is not a gift of the Spirit. Nowhere are we commanded to be nice. In the world being nice carries these meanings: being tolerant, being woolly on principle, never judging, never condemning, never angry, never confrontational and so on. The dictionary definition is being pleasant and agreeable. The Christian cannot be limited by such adjectives; there are times when he must be confrontational, must judge, must condemn etc.

Jesus was not limited by niceness. He could condemn those who opposed him in vigorous terms (Matt 3:7, 12:34, 23:33). He could rebuke his closest friends, sometimes severely (Matt 16:23; Lk 10:40-42). He could issue threats when it was necessary (Matt 23:15, 33). He could confront and expose weakness even in those he loved (Matt 8:26, 16:8). Yet Jesus was the most attractive, loving, winsome, wonderful person the world has ever seen.

Love is not limited by niceness; love will wound when necessary; will confront when required; will speak the truth when it hurts; will admonish to do good. The modern world knows little about real love and instead focuses upon superficial niceness.

Now apostate leaders can be very nice and the modern church, deluded by modern mores, thinks that the niceness is a sufficient sign of godliness. It is not. In fact, many of the worst heretics, that have done the most damage to the church, have been outwardly very nice people. We need discernment.

Good preaching

I have seen apostate leaders have a reputation amongst the churches for good preaching during the years that they were involved in gross sin. Indeed, some preachers have written multiple books, preached thousands of sermons, spoken at numerous conferences, year after year, and yet they were in gross sin.

Preaching a good sermon is not an indication of godliness. It is a fact that many leaders have preached good sermons and written well-received books, despite the fact that they were not believers at all.

God's people need to be far more discerning than they are. I have, more than once, been in the situation where I was suspicious of a leader and said so to friends in his church. Often I was castigated for this and sometimes they deserted me. Once or twice I confronted the leader personally where I had good grounds. Later, it turned out that the person involved was truly apostate and had been for years. No one ever apologised to me.

Doing good works

Sometimes an apostate leader will cover his tracks by being zealous for good works. They travel to counsel people. They visit the sick. They are hospitable. They support the weak and elderly. They comfort the downhearted.

Now all of these are good works; but they do not prove that the person doing them is a good person before God. If they are a means to hide a deeper sin then they are just camouflage and have no worth before God.

Being confrontational

Some leaders adopt a very confrontational stance and gain a reputation for attacking heretics. Their whole ministry is founded upon the fact that they are an apologist for the faith and take no mercy when it comes to dealing with those who oppose the truth.

Very often such people have magazines or websites or blogs that constantly focus upon attacking other people. There is no balance in their ministry, no centring upon Christ, no taking time to uplift the Lord's people with spiritual exposition; it is all confrontational. Sadly, there are some people that love this kind of thing; people that thrive on negativity.

Now exposing false teachers is important but it is only one aspect of true ministry. The centre of ministry is the testimony to Jesus, and that involves many things, not just heresy-hunting.

The constant focus upon attacking others merely hides the fact that the apostate leader should be attacked himself. By getting the flock to centre upon inspecting others for sin and error, they turn the attention away from their own sin and error.

Conclusion

Apostasy is the most serious sin a man can commit. If you abandon the source of salvation there is no other escape from hell.

*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*

It is a sin that is unimaginable to me; why would anyone who knows the Lord and the truth of God's word do such a thing? Why ignore the lifeboat on the Titanic in order to enjoy a little more of the pleasures on board a sinking ship?

Sadly, apostasy is commonplace; it seems to happen somewhere every day. It strikes all sorts of people: suspicious people, godly people, intellectuals, mystics, good preachers, bad preachers, married people, single people, men and women and so on.

Now this study can appear to be negative, but it is a warning. It shows what can happen to even the best of people if they fail to persevere in the faith and fail to trust in the Lord. The way each person lost his faith differs but the result is the same.

The key to perseverance is to keep yourself in the love of God.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Jude 1:21

The way you do this is not some woolly, mystical emotionalism, but involves very practical issues.

Bible study

Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 1 Jn 2:5

Basic to continuing with God is to study his word. If you fail to do this you are cutting yourself off from hearing God and learning about his ways. You cannot stay close to God if you ignore his word.

Knowing the truth

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'. Jn 8:31-32

Those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim 4:3

There is a difference between studying God's word and knowing the truth. The latter stems from the former. It is not enough to just read and study the Bible, it is important to condense its essence into doctrines that you understand and practice. Orthodox doctrines are the truth that is in Christ. Some professing Christians can study the Bible assiduously and know nothing about the truth.

Obeying God

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. Jn 14:21

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him', and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 Jn 2:3-4

Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Rev 14:12

Obeying God is proof that you are continuing with God. Only those who obey God's commandments are truly saved; this is a small proportion of those who claim to be

Christians. Anything that works against you obeying God's commands must be rejected, including all forms of antinomianism² and perfectionism.³

Righteousness

Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who sins is of the devil. 1 Jn 3:7-8

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* he who does not love his brother. 1 Jn 3:10

The fruit of knowing God through his word and then obeying God's commandments is living a righteous life. You cannot continue with God if you are unrighteous. In simple terms this means doing right. Understanding what is right comes from studying God's word.

Good works, charity

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 1 Jn 3:17-1

Continuing with God is not just personal discipline and private devotions, it involves doing good to others and especially the brethren. You are not continuing with God if you ignore the needs of God's people.

Worship God

You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve. Matt 4:10

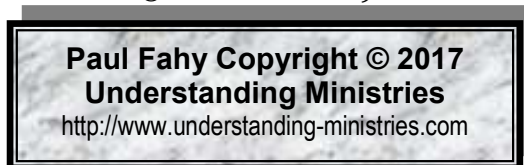
God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. Jn 4:24

Worship is not something merely performed within the congregation on Sunday, whatever church tradition you are from. Worship is not even the reason why the church gathers. Worship is pre-eminently a personal matter and should be conducted at all times, in any place, in many ways. God's people are a worshipping people and his children should be worshipping him constantly.

We could extend this list but this is sufficient. Perseverance comes through various means and these must be pursued by discipline. In the end our perseverance is a gift from God that is part of salvation; it is one of the doctrines of grace; but it is worked out through means and true Christians will discipline themselves to perform these means.

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. 1 Jn 2:28

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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² Ignoring God's law. Making excuses so that one does not have to obey God's law, such as saying that being dead to the law means not needing to perform the moral law or the law of Christ. Antinomians claim that Christians are never guilty and do not need law. This is a serious error.

³ There are various mystical forms of perfectionism. They are doctrines teaching that believers are, or can be, fully perfected, usually by faith or from some sort of mystical experience. Perfectionism leads to antinomianism and downplaying sin.