

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 10 January 2020. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Acts of the Apostates (Part 2)

2 Peter 2:2-3

Over the years, my children have often listened to a Christian children's CD called "Lone Stranger." Toward the end of the CD, one of the characters in the adventure sings a song called "Forked Tongue," which warns about the sly and deceptive way in which Satan deceives people. It goes like this:

Like a snake with tongue a-flick tries to sneak and tries to trick,
So the snake that spoke to Eve used his power to deceive.
Though his words were sweet and kind, Satan was the mastermind,
Looking Eve right in the eyes, mixing truth with lies.

This is Satan's *modus operandi*, folks. This is the way that he has worked ever since the Garden of Eden. He's not going to come to you with a glowing red appearance, enveloped with infernal smoke, with horns, a tail, and a pitchfork. He won't knock on your door, speak in a deep, scary voice, and demand that you deny God and worship him. No, he will come to you with sweet, kind words; and he will say enough *truth* to make his big lie sound credible, and even godly. In other words, he'll mix truth with lies.

He won't speak to you personally, either; rather, he'll speak to you through human ministers. He'll make his human ministers look good and godly, so that you will believe his lies. Paul warned us about these ministers in **2 Corinthians 11:13-14**. He wrote: "***For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.***"

Now, if you heard last week's message, you'll remember that we were talking about ***The Acts of the Apostates***. In case you need a little review, the word "apostate" comes from the word *apostasia*, which means "departure." An apostate is someone who *departs* from the truth. An apostate is someone who has *heard* the truth. (In fact, he may, at some point, have come close to the threshold of receiving the truth.) Yet, he has rejected the truth, and is now *drawing others* away from the truth.

Sadly, we live in a world that is full of apostates. The Bible calls them false apostles, false prophets, and false teachers. Every Christian under the sound of my voice should be on guard against the false teachings of apostates, and should be prepared to warn others against them. Perhaps you do not know Christ as Saviour. If so, you need to be warned about the false teachers who are trying to keep you from coming to Christ for salvation. By God's grace, that is what I will endeavour to do today.

I've entitled this message ***The Acts of the Apostates (Part 2)***

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3.

From these verses, I shall point out three characteristics of apostates.

I. Apostates have large followings (v. 2).

Please notice what Peter says here in **verse 2**. First, he describes the “*ways*” of apostate teachers. He calls their ways “*pernicious*.” What does this mean? It means “destructive” or “ruinous.” Apostate teachers bring spiritual *destruction* to themselves and to their followers—both in this life, and in the next. That’s pretty scary stuff! However, that’s not all. Notice what Peter says about the *number* of people who follow their destructive ways. Does he say that “few” follow them? No! He says that “*many*” follow their “*pernicious ways*”! Let’s face it. Most people gauge a religion’s “validity” according to how large its following is, or according to how much wealth it possesses, or how big and beautiful its buildings are. But what does the Bible say? The Bible indicates exactly the opposite! Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord refers to His people as a “remnant”—a *small* number. God assures us that the number of people who truly believe in and follow Him is *small*. Jesus referred to His church as a “*little flock*.” In **Luke 12:32** Jesus said, “*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*” Exactly how small was His flock? **John chapter 6** gives us a good idea. Let’s take a look at it.

Read John 6:60-71.

On the day when Jesus preached His “Bread of Life” sermon, He lost a *huge* number of “disciples.” Yet, only the day before, when He fed 5,000 men (and possibly as many as 20,000 people altogether) with five loaves of bread and two fishes, the people were so impressed, that they tried to crown Him King of Israel! Yet, Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that most of them were not really His followers.

The real state of their hearts became obvious the next day, when the people found Jesus on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. That day, Jesus preached a hard-hitting sermon about eternal life. He told them exactly what their hard hearts needed to hear. He did not modify or water down His “hard doctrines.” What was the result? *The people left in droves!* Yet, what did Jesus do? Did He run after them and say, “Oh, won’t you please stay?” No. He made not even the slightest attempt to retrieve them. He stood there in silence, and let them go. After the crowd had left, and Jesus was left alone with the twelve disciples (and, possibly, with a small number of other true followers), He turned to the twelve and said, “*Will ye also go away?*” It’s as though He was saying, “If you want to leave too, you may do so.” Now, Peter spoke right up. He said, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*” He *thought* that he was speaking for *all* of them. Yet, unbeknown to Peter, there was one of them who was *not* sure that Jesus was the Christ. That man was Judas Iscariot. Jesus, being God, knew this; and He informed them (to their shock, I’m sure) that one of them was a devil!

Now, you’d think, from the way Jesus handled this situation, that He didn’t *want* to have a large following! First, He preached a hard message, which offended most of the crowd. Then, when the crowd began to walk away, He didn’t run after them, or try to make concessions to get them back. Instead, He simply let them go. Then, he told His small number of remaining disciples that they were free to go if they wished--and, furthermore, that one of them was a devil! By man’s standard, this certainly wasn’t a good “PR” move on Jesus’ part! But, you see, Jesus is not a “PR” man. He does not seek big numbers. God seeks for people who will tremble at His Word. He seeks for people who will humble themselves before Him, admit their sinfulness, admit their need of His sacrifice on the cross, and receive Him by faith alone.

Sadly, there aren't many people who *will* humble themselves before the Lord Jesus Christ. In any given epoch of history, it is only a "remnant"—a small number of people—that is saved. Jesus assured us of this sobering truth in His Sermon on the Mount.

Read Matthew 7:13-14.

Jesus says that the way of salvation is "strait and narrow," and that the way to destruction is "wide" and "broad." What, then, does this tell us about those who *preach* the true way of salvation? It tells us a lot! Just as the number of people who are *saved* is small, so the number of those who preach the true Gospel is small. Teachers of the true Gospel will always have a small following; and teachers of false gospels will always have a large following.

Now, does this mean that a true, Gospel-preaching church will never have a larger number of people in its membership? No. Sometimes, when the soil of men's hearts is well-prepared for the Gospel, there *is* revival in a country or region, and larger numbers of people *do* receive Christ, and then follow Him in baptism, and join legitimate New Testament churches. In the late 1300's in England, and in the early 1500's in Europe, and in the late 1700's and late 1800's in England and America, there were times when the Gospel was received in great numbers, and when multitudes of people were saved. Yet, even during these amazing times in history, genuine Christians were still a small minority. They were an *influential* minority--but a small minority, nonetheless. The world at large despised them, and mocked them, and persecuted them. The world will *always* despise those who proclaim the true Gospel. In fact, when the world *loves* a professed follower of Jesus, it's a sign that something isn't right!

Read Luke 6:20-26.

When a professed Christian leader is universally loved and adored by the culture at large--and especially by the media, the educational institutions, the entertainment industry, and the government--you may be assured that that person is an apostate who is *not* proclaiming the true Gospel! The world does *not* love the Gospel; and anyone who is preaching the true Gospel will not be loved. The world wants to hear *lies* that make them feel good about themselves. The world does not want to hear the truth of the Gospel, because the Gospel message demands that we see ourselves as undeserving sinners. The Gospel demands that we repent. The Gospel demands that we abandon our own imagined goodness, and our desire to live for self and sin, and that we believe on the One who died and rose again for us. That is not agreeable to a world that is in love with its sin. Here is what the world wants to hear.

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

The world loves their own lusts and desires. They also love "*fables*" such as evolution, and psychology, and New Age spirituality, and Marxism. They do *not* want to hear the truth; and anyone who tells the truth is shouted down. As the prophet Isaiah put it, "***Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey.***" In other words, if you try to do right, you make yourself a target to those who hate the truth.

What are we to do, then? Should we shut our mouths, and be the "silent in the land"? Not on your life! We who know Christ *must* boldly proclaim the Gospel to a world that does not want

to hear it. The responsibility to teach the Gospel to the lost, and to guard it from corruption, is not merely for pastors; it is incumbent upon *every* local church, and upon every member of the local church. The work of an “evangelist” (which, by the way, means “good-news teller”) belongs to *every* believer, and not just to the pastor. However, in order to teach the Gospel, we must be aware of *false* Gospels, and of false teachers. Be on the lookout for apostate teachers, Christian! Don’t assume that because someone uses biblical terms like “born again” and “saved,” and has a big following, he must be someone whom you can trust. (In fact, if he be a big-named, well-funded, T.V. personality, you do well to be extra cautious, and to check carefully what he really believes and teaches!) Know the Gospel inside and outside! Know this Book, and evaluate what teachers say in light of it!

Now, what is another characteristic of apostates? Another characteristic is that...

II. Apostates cause the truth to be “*evil spoken of*” (verse 2).

Now, let’s refresh ourselves on the second half of **2 Peter 2:2**. (**Read verse 2.**) Peter says that because many would follow the pernicious ways of apostate teachers, the way of truth would be “*evil spoken of*.” Let’s look at an example of an apostate who caused the way of truth to be “*evil spoken of*”; and as we do so, we will see how God’s men responded to her.

Read Acts 16:16-24.

Here’s the situation. In this city of Philippi, Paul and Silas encountered a dangerous enemy. She wasn’t dangerous because she was trying to kill them (as was often the case in other cities): rather, she was dangerous because of *what she was saying*. This woman who followed Paul was a “diviner.” Today, we would call her a “medium,” or “psychic.” In short, she was a witch. She was possessed by one of Satan’s demons; and through this spirit, she told people their “futures.” By the way, Satan’s demons *can*, to an extent, manipulate events, so as to create the illusion that their predictions have come true. That is exactly what the demons were doing through this young woman. Whether she realised it or not, she was an agent of Satan.

However, not only was she an agent of Satan: she was an *apostate*. She had heard the truth from Paul and Silas; yet, she rejected it, *and tried to confuse people* by mixing the truth with lies. What truth was she proclaiming? She was going around town saying, “***These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.***” Now, why were Paul and Silas grieved about this? After all, what the woman was saying was true! They *were* servants of the Most High God, and they *were* proclaiming the way of salvation! Weren’t they happy to be getting some “free advertising”? No, they weren’t! Why? Because the person who was saying these words was an agent of Satan! By “praising” the Most High God, while practicing occult divination, this woman was causing confusion in people’s minds. She was making it appear that Paul and Silas’s message was basically the same as *her* message. By simply praising Paul and Silas, she was corrupting Paul and Silas’ Gospel, and turning it into another gospel!

This story reveals a couple important things about how Satan works. First, it reveals that Satan *does* often tell the truth! **However**, when Satan tells a truth, he always tells that truth so that he can mix it with lies, and draw people away from the *real* truth. You see, everyone knew what this woman did. She “divined” through the power of Satan. So, by declaring Paul and

Silas to be servants of the Most High God, she was causing the truth to be “*evil spoken of.*” All over town, people were coming to the conclusion that this God whom Paul and Silas preached must not have any problem with witchcraft and idol worship. Why? Because the local witch was speaking good things about Paul and Silas, and about their God!

You see, Satan isn’t bothered so much when Christians give Gospel presentations—as long as we don’t clearly point out *the difference* between the truth and *his corrupt mixtures of truth and lies*. When Paul and Silas cast out the demon, they were making it known to everyone that this woman was *not* on their side. Needless to say, Satan was *not* happy about this. It was at this point that Satan stirred up the people of Philippi to cast Paul and Silas into prison. Satan was furious that Paul and Silas had exposed his little “trick.” As long as this woman was going around saying, “*These men are servants of the most high God,*” the people who heard her were thinking, “Oh, the Most High God must not have a problem with witchcraft, because this diviner woman speaks good words about the Most High God. There’s no need for us to turn from our witchcraft and follow the God that these men preach. Their religion is O.K., and our religion is O.K. Maybe we can even mix their Jesus with our idol worship.” However, when Paul and Silas made it clearly known that the spirit of divination in the woman was God’s enemy, and cast him out, Satan pulled out the “big guns.”

Apostates cause the truth of the Gospel to be evil spoken of. That is why God’s people *must* separate themselves from apostate religions and apostate religious leaders, and clearly define to the world the difference between the true Gospel, and the apostates’ false gospels. If we do not clearly separate ourselves from apostates, we are actually *helping* the apostates to spread their false teachings. Now and then, I am asked to get this church involved in joint-efforts with churches of other beliefs to fight for moral issues in society, or even to cooperate in joint evangelistic efforts. Yet, how can we do this, when many of these churches are not preaching the true Gospel at all? If Redemption Baptist Church were to link arms with churches that baptise babies, or that teach that baptism and sacraments can save, or that teach that you need to speak in tongues in order to be saved, or that teach that a Christian can lose his salvation, we would be declaring, “These other ‘gospels’ of salvation aren’t really false; they’re O.K.” We ourselves would be taking part in their apostasy! God have mercy on this church if we ever do this! We, as God’s people, *must* separate from apostasy in every form!

Now, there is one other way in which apostates cause the truth to be evil spoken of. Because apostates’ ways are manifestly evil, even many non-Christians are able to recognise their ways as evil; however, because these apostates claim to be “Christians,” many people assume that all Christianity must be false and bogus. For example, many lost people look in disgust at the phony “preachers” on T.V. who claim to be able to heal people, but who are after nothing but money. Then, when true Christians try to share the true Gospel with them, they say, “I don’t want Christianity. It’s all fake. You’re all hypocrites. All your church wants is my money.” What are we to do then, brethren? Do we skulk in shame into the shadows, and give up the fight, and silently wait for Christ to come? No! Here’s what we should be doing.

Read Philippians 2:14-16.

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12.

What do Paul and Peter advise Christians to do when people misjudge us, and speak evil of us, and speak evil of the Gospel? It's simple. Just keep doing what God has commanded us to do! Keep showing by your godly life that the Gospel really *does* change a man from the inside out. Don't complain about your problems, and throw spiritual temper tantrums when things aren't going the way you think they should go. Don't fight and argue with each other. Don't give in to your flesh. Keep trusting God, and keep living the way that God has commanded you to live. Keep being a good testimony. As you do so, keep proclaiming the Word of God. Keep patiently showing people the difference between truth and error; and keep praying that the Spirit of God will one day open people's eyes to the truth, so that they may be saved. Apostates cause the truth to be evil spoken of; but our God is greater than they!

Now, what else characterises apostates?

III. Apostates make merchandise of their followers (verse 3)

(Read 2 Peter 2:3 again.) Throughout the Scriptures, we are told that salvation is a free gift. Yet, this gift wasn't free to Christ. He's the one who paid for it! In His incredible love for us, He paid the price for sin which His own justice demanded. He shed His precious blood to purchase our salvation. Yet to us, salvation *is* free for the taking.

In **Isaiah 55**, the prophet Isaiah compared salvation to free drink, or to free bread, which satisfies the soul; and he urged his hearers simply to come and receive it! He said, ***“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good.”*** What *is* this free bread, exactly? Its is Christ Himself! Jesus said, ***“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”*** Lest you wonder what this means, Jesus explained Himself clearly. He said, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life.”***

It is so simple, my friends! To “eat” the Bread of Life simply means to “believe on Christ.” Salvation isn't a long list of works and rituals that we must do in order to earn our salvation. Christ already earned it for us! We have simply to receive it by faith and repentance of heart. Yet, this way of salvation, simple and gracious though it is, is *always* denied (or ignored) by apostates, in order that they might make ***“merchandise”*** of their followers! For example, apostate men in Rome tell us that we must give money in order to purchase our salvation. In fact, they say that we must continue to pay money for our relatives' salvation, even after they are dead. In the early 1500's, a man named Tetzal went through Germany telling people, “When the gold in the box rings, a soul from purgatory springs.” Yet the Bible says that ***“ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold....but with the precious blood of Christ”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19). The palaces of Rome drip with gold and jewels. They were built upon the backs of millions of poor men and women who believed that salvation can be purchased with money. The apostates of Rome make merchandise of their souls.

Now, lest you think I'm singling out the Church of Rome, I am not. Many false teachers who are called by the name “Baptist” used ***“feigned”*** (pretentious) words to make merchandise of people, as well. I'll give you a couple examples. There is an apostate Southern Baptist

preacher named Rick Warren in America, who is spoken of with nothing but praise by the media. He is invited to speak to elite groups all the time. He accepted the invitation to say a prayer at the inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009. He goes all around the world talking about striving for “world peace.” The problem is, he never preaches the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ. For example, in February of 2006, he was invited to TedTalks—a forum of millionaires, CEO’s, and government leaders. Did he preach salvation through the cross of Jesus? Did he say anything about man’s sinful condition, or about God’s absolute holiness, or about our need of atonement through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, or about Christ’s resurrection? Did he even mention Jesus’ name? He did not. He talked mostly about the success of his best-selling book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. He talked about the money he has given to charity, and the projects he has developed. He wound up his talk like this:

“So the good life is not about looking good, feeling good, or having the goods. It’s about being good and doing good. The bottom line is that God gets pleasure watching you be you. Why? He made you. And when you do what you are made to do, He goes, ‘That’s my boy; that’s my girl.’ You are using the talent and the ability that God gave you.’ So my advice to you is: look at what is in your hand, your identity, your influence, your income. And say, ‘It’s not about me; it’s about making the world a better place.’”¹

The world doesn’t need to be made a “better place” through philanthropy: it needs salvation through the blood of Jesus! Yet, Rick Warren said nothing about this at TedTalks. He gave the people in that room the false hope that God is smiling on them and saying “Attaboy!”—when, in fact, the wrath of God is abiding on them because of their sin. Rick Warren also didn’t say anything about the Gospel when he appeared on the T.V. show *Lifeclass*, which is hosted by Oprah Winfrey. Researcher David Cloud summed up this interview this way:

“Warren did not mention sin, repentance, the cross, or the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead, he dished out a big helping of the power of positive thinking: which is not surprising, since this is Oprah’s main theme, and she wouldn’t have invited him had she thought that he would preach a clear gospel message. Winfrey is one of the most influential promoters of New Age heresy in the world today, and yet she also claims to be a Christian, a Baptist nonetheless. She often talks about her upbringing, and how the church shaped her life, but she blends Christian faith with pagan spirituality. She was raised in a Baptist church in Mississippi, the daughter of a deacon.....but she rejects the “negatives” of the biblical faith, such as the fall of man and redemption only through Calvary. She uses biblical terms, but defines them according to the New Age dictionary.....Oprah [says] that being born again is the same as being “connected to the higher Self”.....Oprah’s 2005 book *Live Your Best Life* promotes her philosophy that everything is one, man is divine, and man can create his own reality. Her gospel is that man is *not* a sinner, God is *not* a judge, all is well with the universe, and I just need to surrender to the *flow*.”²

The world smiles and cheers when apostates deny the blood-stained way of salvation through Jesus Christ. However, *God* says that their “**damnation slumbereth not.**” There is coming a day when they will stand before a righteous God, and will give an answer for why they rejected salvation through His Son, and led many people to reject Him, as well.

Conclusion: The Bible says that “**God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**” Brethren, we should not delight in the thought that apostates are heading to damnation. Christ died for their sins, just as He died for ours. We should pray that they may yet repent and be saved.

¹ David Cloud, *Friday Church News Notes*, vol. 14, issue 5. (wayoflife.org , February 1, 2013)

² David Cloud, *Friday Church News Notes*, vol. 14, issue 10. (wayoflife.org, March 8, 2013)

Yet, at the same time, we need to be vigilant, bold, and not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Standing for the Gospel requires standing against the false words of apostates; and when you do that, you may count on being persecuted and evil spoken of. When this happens, remember what Jesus said: ***“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”*** Now, if you have never placed your trust in Christ to save you, please don’t listen to those who say that you can make it to heaven some way other than Jesus Christ. Christ is your only Hope! *Please* repent and turn to Him today!