

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 3 January 2021. 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”**

### **2 Peter 2:1**

There is a book in the New Testament that we call **“The Acts of the Apostles.”** This book is a record of the work that Christ’s Apostles did in the early days of the church age. These special men called “Apostles” were sent out by Christ to preach the Gospel, and to lay the foundation of the churches.

Now, not many men held the office of “Apostle.” It was a very special office. First, there were the original twelve Apostles, who walked with Jesus when He was here on earth. These men took the Gospel mostly to the Jewish people. Then, there were about eight more Apostles, whom God called to their office shortly *after* Christ had gone back to heaven--men such as Paul, and Barnabas. These men took the Gospel mostly to the Gentiles. This group of 20 or so men was unique. They had unique power and authority, which no one else has been given since. There is no office of Apostle anymore. It has ceased.

Yet, in another sense, *every* Christian is a “sent one.” The word “Apostle” means “sent one”: so you might say that we are “apostles” with a *little* “a”! Every believer has been “sent” by the Lord Jesus Christ to serve Him in His institution, the local church. And what is the commission that He has given to His church? The church’s commission is to **“teach all nations”** the Gospel message; to baptise them **“in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”** after they are saved; and then, to teach them **“to observe all things”** that Christ has commanded. That is precisely what the Apostles did. They led many thousands of people to Christ, and established hundreds of churches. Their acts of sacrifice still follow them. We are here today because of their sacrifice; and we are carrying on the Lord’s work!

Now, from the earliest days of the church age, there has been another kind of people called “apostates.” What is an apostate? The word “apostate” comes from the Greek word *apostasia*, which means “departure.” Apostates are people who *depart* from the truth of salvation that they have heard. There may have been a time when these people came *close* to the threshold of salvation, and when they *looked* and *talked* like a true believer. However, they never were truly saved; and now that they have chosen to walk away from the truth that they once *almost* embraced, they seek to undermine the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to turn people from the truth. This is the definition of an “apostate.”

Jesus and His Apostles warned that the works of the apostates would get worse and worse as the church age progressed; and they warned Christians to be on guard against them. In this morning’s message, we will study one of these warning passages. If the book of **Acts** be called **“The Acts of the Apostles,”** then we could call **2 Peter 2** “The Acts of the *Apostates*.” As we go through **2 Peter 2** in the coming weeks, you will learn the characteristics of apostates. You will see what apostates are; what they do; *how* they go about their evil work; and what their end will be. The title of this message is ***The Acts of the Apostates***.

**Read 2 Peter 2:1.**

In this verse, we see three important characteristics of apostates. First of all, Peter points out that...

## I. Apostates arise from within churches.

In **verse 1**, Peter says that there “*were false prophets*” among the people. What “people” is Peter talking about? He’s talking about God’s covenant people, the nation of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, God raised up prophets to give God’s Word to Israel. However, Satan was always ready to counteract God’s prophets with his own *false* prophets. Now, usually, these false prophets did not deny the existence of Jehovah, or His marvellous works. They *talked* about Jehovah, and invoked His name. They went to the Temple, and did the sacrifices. Yet, they gave false “prophecies” which contradicted God’s Word, and which encouraged the people to add idol worship to their worship of Jehovah. If these false prophets did not actively *promote* idol worship, they would, at the very least, not speak *against* it. They would bless the people in the name of the LORD, even though they knew that the people were worshiping idols. They condoned the people’s wicked ways, and gave them false hope of peace with God. They claimed to have messages of peace from the LORD, when, in fact, God had not spoken to them at all. Let’s look at an example.

### Read 1 Kings 22:2-28.

God’s true prophet, Micaiah, paid dearly for preaching the truth, didn’t he? Because he dared to speak God’s message of judgment, he was thrown into prison, and was given barely enough bread and water to live. Yet, just as Micaiah had warned, King Ahab died in battle, and Israel was badly defeated. As for King Jehoshaphat, he barely escaped with his life. By the way, brethren, there is a lesson to be learned, here. Jehoshaphat was a righteous man; and as a righteous man, he shouldn’t have made any alliances with wicked King Ahab! When God’s people try to “dialogue” and cooperate with apostates, there is always a high price to pay!

Now, you’ll notice that these 400 men who gave their so-called “prophecy” to Ahab *professed* to be representatives of Jehovah. Yet, they refused to speak against Ahab’s idol worship. Furthermore, they told the king exactly what *he* wanted them to say. They professed that God was *with* Ahab, even though they knew very well that Ahab was God’s enemy, and that God was *against* him. They were in it only for the money and prestige. They were “apostates.”

Remember, an “apostate” is someone who *knows* the truth, and who, perhaps, *professes* the truth; yet he departs from the truth, and even draws others away with him. And what does Peter say about these people? He warns Christians that there will be “*false teachers*” among *us*, just as there were in Israel in Old Testament times. He’s warning us to “be on guard”!

Now, there are two kinds of apostates. First, an apostate may be someone who *knows* that he is a phony, and who has purposely set out to draw people away from the truth. For example, back in the 1980’s, when my former pastor was pastoring a church in Texas, his church was infiltrated by two witches. These witches pretended to be Christians so that they could corrupt the church; and they did a masterful job of it. (Thankfully, one of these two witches eventually got saved!) Now, the second kind of apostate is someone who actually *thinks* he is a Christian. He is sincere; but he is self-deceived, and he is deceiving others. Either way, an apostate is someone who has heard the truth, and who *should* have repented, but never did; and he proceeds to draw others away from the truth. Here is a good example of an apostate.

### Read Acts 8:9-24.

Simon never truly repented of his sin; yet, he “believed” with a “head belief” that appeared genuine. Even the Apostle Peter was fooled, at first, into thinking that Simon was saved. Tragically, Simon came near the *threshold* of salvation; but he never repented. We know from history that Simon the Sorcerer started his own false, paganised version of “Christianity.” (He claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus.) In time, he became a bitter opponent of Christianity. Now, as I said before, apostates often arise from *within* Bible-preaching churches! A false teacher doesn’t have to be a well-known “Christian leader.” An apostate may be a church member who is not truly saved, and who, in ignorance, is going around saying false and damnable things, and drawing people away from truth. Dr. Ron Comfort once told about a man who approached him after a church service and said, “Brother Comfort, three years ago, when you were here...I was saved. May I tell you a story? I had been a deacon in this fundamental Baptist church for fifteen years. As an 11-year-old boy, I made a profession in order to get my mom and dad off my back. For fifteen years, the folks in this church did not know that I was an unsaved deacon.”<sup>1</sup> Can you imagine how much influence this lost deacon, who everyone *thought* was a Christian, might have had in the church during those fifteen years, as he, in spiritual blindness, ignorantly uttered false things? Tragically, there are *many* Bible-preaching churches that are filled with members who have never truly been saved, and who are influencing others. This is exactly what the Apostles warned us about! This is the very thing about which *Paul* warned the elders of the church of Ephesus.

### **Read Acts 20:25-31.**

We all want to believe that church is a place where everything is always joyful and peaceful, and where there are never any problems or divisions. However, such is not the case. We have an enemy who is very crafty. Satan can raise up people who *appear* to be Christians, and plant them within the assembly. For a while, it may appear that they are Christians; but in time, they begin to teach false doctrine. When that happens, a spiritual battle *must* ensue. If you doubt me, I encourage you to read **Revelation 2-3**. The Lord had to command two of the seven churches of Asia to cast out false teachers from their assemblies. Many Christians would say, “Well, I don’t have the stomach for that.” We’d *better* have the stomach for it, because apostasy can arise in *any* church. We must be ready to “*contend for the faith.*”

Satan hates Bible-preaching churches. He will do whatever it takes to destroy them. If Satan can’t destroy churches through outside force (by inciting false religions to kill Christians, or hostile governments to outlaw Christians’ beliefs and practices), then he will destroy them by bringing false teachers into the churches, and turning them into apostate churches. By the way, this is why the pastor has such a tremendous responsibility. As a pastor, I must answer to God for how faithfully I protect this flock from false doctrine. However, the responsibility also rests upon *all* members of the assembly. Every born-again, baptised member of this church must know the truth, and be equipped to defend it at all costs!

### **Read Jude 1-4.**

Now, the second characteristic of false teachers is that...

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ron Comfort, *Last Things* (Lattimore, NC: Ambassador Baptist College, 2011), pp. 23-24.

## II. Apostates deny the Lord.

**(Read verse 1 again.)** What does Peter mean when he says that false teachers “deny the Lord”? Does he mean that these teachers openly say, “Jesus is false. Jesus is evil. Don’t follow Jesus”? No, that’s not what he means. On the contrary, apostates will *talk* about Jesus Christ, and use words that make it appear that they are Christians. Yet, they present *another* Jesus—a “Jesus” other than the Jesus of the Bible. For example, they’ll present a “Jesus” whose sacrifice on the cross is *not* all-sufficient—a Jesus who says that you must do good works, sacraments, or rituals in order to pay the debt for your sins. To teach a false gospel of salvation is to deny the Lord, and to preach “another Jesus.”

### Read Galatians 1:6-9 and 3:1-3.

According to Paul, people who add good works and Law-keeping to salvation are preaching “another Gospel,” and “another Jesus.” Now, we who are saved cannot lose our *salvation* when we are influenced by those who preach “another Jesus”; but we certainly *can* lose peace and joy in our hearts, and waste many precious years which could have been used in service to God. We *will* suffer great spiritual harm in our lives if we listen to false teachers. Christian, don’t give ear to just any person who claims to “believe in Jesus.” Carefully examine what they are saying against the Scripture. God commands us to be cautious and discerning, and to put people’s teachings to the test! The Bible says, **“Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”**

Now, I would like to give you a sampling of some teachers from the past and present who have *denied the Lord* in one form or another. I’m going to name some names. You’ve heard of the “Hall of Faith” in **Hebrews 11**—that list of faithful men and women who did great things for God? Well, I would like to present to you what I call the “Hall of Apostasy.” Consider the words of these apostates.

First, consider the words of some of the popes of the past and present. **Pope Innocent III** said: “The Pope holdeth place on earth, not simply of a man, but of the true God.” **Pope Nicholas** said: “I am in all, and above all, so that God Himself, and I, the Vicar of God, hath both one consistory, and I am able to do almost all that God can do.” The **Lateran Council**, addressing **Pope Julian II**, said, “Take care that we lose not that salvation, that life and breath which *thou* hast given us, for *thou* art Shepherd, *thou* art Physician, *thou* art Governor, *thou* art Husbandman, *thou*, finally, art another God on earth.” **Pope Pius X** said: “The Pope is not simply the representative of Jesus Christ: On the contrary, he is Jesus Christ Himself, under the veil of the flesh. Does the Pope speak? It is Jesus Christ who is speaking.” **Pope Pius IX** said: “I alone am the Successor of the Apostles, the vicar of Jesus Christ. I am the way, the truth, and the life.” In 1984, **Pope John Paul II** said: “Don’t go to God for forgiveness of sins: come to me.” **Benedict XVI**’s official Vatican portrait is entitled *The Way, the Truth, and the Life: Portrait of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI*. Pope Benedict XVI also said, in his book *God and the World*, “There are perfectly good reasons....for denying that the Old Testament refers to Christ.” In other words, according Benedict, Jesus is not necessarily the promised Messiah, and the Old Testament does *not* testify of Him!

Folks, this is apostasy. This is **“the spirit of antichrist**. By claiming to be God on earth, the popes put themselves in the place of Christ. However, Jesus’ words still stand. Jesus said, **“I**

*am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” The Bible says, *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* The Bible says, *“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?”*

Now, consider the words of an apostate named **Kenneth Copeland** (and others like him). He’s one of those guys that you see on The God Channel. Kenneth Copeland is on record as saying that Christians are “gods.” In one T.V. broadcast, Copeland said, “He [Christ] imparted in you when you were born again—Peter said it just as plain, he said, ‘We are partakers of the divine nature.’...And that [nature] was imparted, injected into your spirit man....You don’t *have* a god in you. You *are* one.”<sup>2</sup> Copeland teaches that Christians have been restored to the “god class,” which Adam lost when he sinned. Copeland once said, “I say this with all respect, so that I don’t upset you too bad. But I say it anyway: When I read in the Bible where [God] says, ‘I am,’ I just smile and say, ‘Yes, I am, too.’”<sup>3</sup> By the way, this “we are little gods” doctrine has also been taught by **Benny Hinn, Paul Crouch, Joyce Meyers,** and many others on the God Channel. My friends, this promise of becoming “gods” was the original lie of Satan in the garden! Copeland, Hinn, and all their like, are apostates!

Now, consider the words of one of the most famous evangelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century--a man named **Billy Graham**. Though his salvation sermons *sounded* biblical, he always locked arms with apostate religious leaders, and called them “brothers.” Strangely, the liberal press never spoke against him. In fact, they always *praised* him. (That, in itself, should tell you something!) In a television interview with Robert Schuller on May 31, 1997, Graham said, “I think everybody that loves Christ, or knows Christ, *whether they're conscious of it or not*, they're members of the Body of Christ....God is...calling people out of the world for His name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world, or the Christian world, or the non-believing world. They are members of the body of Christ, because they’ve been called by God. *They may not even know the name of Jesus*, but they know in their hearts that they need something that they don't have, and they turn to the only light that they have, and I think that they are saved, and that they're going to be with us in heaven.” (By the way, the interviewer, Robert Schuller, also taught that everyone will get to heaven.) Folks, this is a lie! What did Jesus say? He said, *“Many are called (in other words, everyone is *called* to be saved), but few are chosen”* (in other words, very few *are* saved). The Bible says of Jesus, *“Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)*. Those who say that you can get to heaven without hearing the name of Jesus, and without responding in faith to Christ’s call to salvation, are apostates; and they are speeding people along on their way to the Lake of Fire!

Speaking of the Lake of Fire, I have one more apostate for you to consider. His name is **Rob Bell**. Though Bell is called an “evangelical,” his teachings are utter heresy. He denies that there is a real, literal hell to which unbelievers will be condemned forever. In his book, *Love Wins*, he claims that “Jesus’ story has been hijacked” by those old-fashioned people who actually believe that “a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell, with no chance for anything better.”<sup>4</sup> Bell teaches that heaven and hell are “present realities.”

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Copeland, “The Force of Love” (Fort Worth: Kenneth Copeland Ministries, n.d.), cassette tape #02-0028.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Copeland, “The Believer’s Voice of Victory” broadcast, July 9, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, 2011, p. Vii, preface

(In other words, “heaven and hell are here on earth.”)<sup>5</sup> In an interview, he openly said that everyone will make it to heaven eventually, even if they do have to suffer some sort of “hell” in the afterlife. He said: “At the end of the book of Revelation is this picture of a city, this renewed, restored city, heaven and earth come together....and then there are people who aren’t in it; and those are the people who choose to lie and murder, and all those sorts of things. And there’s this beautiful thing—it’s almost as though the writer is sort of “wink, wink, nudge, nudge”—as he throws in this, “oh, there’s a gate in the city, *and it never shuts.*”<sup>6</sup> Simply put, Bell is saying that heaven’s gates are open *even to people who rejected the Lord Jesus Christ* and His way of salvation. He’s saying that eventually, somehow, some way, even the most defiant rejecter of Jesus Christ will make it into heaven. But what does the Bible say?

### **Read Revelation 21:23-27 and 22:11.**

God says that *only those who are saved* will live in the New Heaven and New Earth, and will go in and out of that beautiful city. Those who rejected Christ in this life will remain in their sinful condition forever, and will be barred from Heaven for eternity. My friend, you’d better believe that hell is real! False teachers like Bell, who deny hell’s existence, are denying the Lord Jesus, who repeatedly warned us not to end up in that horrible place. Apostates *deny the Lord*; and they do so to their own peril. This brings me to one last characteristic of apostates.

### **III. Apostates bring swift destruction upon themselves.**

**(Read verse 1 again.)** Peter says that apostates bring “*swift destruction*” upon themselves. Why? Because they deny the Lord! You can’t deny the Lord, and not face destruction!

Now, this raises an important question. What does Peter mean when he says that the Lord “*bought*” these apostates? That word “*bought*” means “redeemed” or “purchased.” Is Peter saying that these men were *saved* at one point, but then turned away from the truth, and *lost* their salvation? No. These people *never* belonged to Him. Jesus warned that there will be many religious leaders who *called* Him “Lord” with their lips, but who will end up in hell. They will stand before Him and say, “*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works?*” But Jesus’ response will be, “*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” He won’t say, “I *once* knew you; but not anymore.” No, He will say, “*I never knew you.*”

Why, then, does Peter say that the Lord “*bought*” these apostates? Can a person be “bought,” yet not saved? Yes! You see, the Bible teaches that **Christ bought all men!** Christ didn’t die only for those who would *repent* of their sins; He also died for those who He knew would *never* repent. Christ’s offer of salvation *is sincere*; and it is offered to all. Everyone has the *chance* to be saved, because Christ bought our salvation! **But**, each person *must* receive it!

### **Read 1 John 2:1-2.**

That word “*propitiation*” means “satisfaction” or “payment.” And for whose sins is Christ the “*propitiation*”? John says that Christ is the propitiation for the “*sins of the whole world*”! That includes apostates! Apostates were “bought” with the blood of Christ, 2,000 years ago. The problem is that they have chosen to *reject* Christ’s precious gift of salvation.

Now, maybe you’re thinking, “I’m not sure I understand this, pastor. If apostates were ‘bought’ by Christ’s blood, doesn’t it mean that they are *saved* (or *were* saved at some

<sup>5</sup> Velvet Elvis, 2005, p. 147

<sup>6</sup> Velvet Elvis, 2005, p. 147

point)?” No, it doesn’t. Think of it this way. In my country, prior to 1863, there was a terrible institution called slavery. In those days, there were many true, born-again Christians who hated the institution of slavery; yet, they were powerless to exert enough influence in society to overturn it. So, many of them went out and *bought* slaves, so that they could eventually free them. They would buy them, treat them with respect and kindness, educate them, teach them a trade; and, most importantly, try to win them to Jesus Christ. Then, when their slaves were able to support themselves, they freed them.

However, even after they were freed, many slaves chose to remain with their masters as hired servants, out of love for their masters. In a way, this is how it is with salvation. Those who have received Christ’s forgiveness choose to serve Christ out of a heart of *love and thankfulness* to Him.

Now, even this illustration falls short. The one problem with this illustration is that the slave owners actually let their slaves free eventually, so that they could be their *own masters*. But that’s not the way it is with salvation. The Bible says that Christ purchased us *not* so that we could “be our own masters,” but so that we could be *His* servants. According to the Bible, you are either a slave of sin and Satan; or you have been *freed* from sin and Satan, and have now become a servant of Jesus Christ. God defines being *His* servant as “freedom.” Jesus said, “***If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.***” Yet, being “free” doesn’t mean that “I can do whatever *I* want to do now.” **Romans 6:18** says, “***Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.***” Those who are saved are freed from sin; yet, *they are now servants of Christ, and of righteousness.*

So, here’s another illustration for you. Imagine that a wealthy man goes to a slave market and pays the price for all the slaves that are up for sale. He buys them so that they may be freed from the tyranny of their cruel master. Yet, he explains that **these slaves must own him as their new master**. That is the only condition. He makes it clear that they will be *his* servants, and that they will love and serve him. However, their life will not be hard, as it has been under their old master. Their yoke will be easy, and their burden light. He will treat them with impeccable kindness. Though he will be their master, he will call himself their brother, and will make them co-heirs of his inheritance. They will be his ambassadors, and do his missions. They will be provided with everything they need. They will be given positions of great authority, and will be given wonderful rewards for their service. Also, he will one day give them a beautiful mansion of their own in which to live. All they have to do is acknowledge that it was by no merit of their own that they were given this kindness. They must freely *receive* the purchase that He made for them, and own him as their master.

Now, imagine if most of these slaves were to reject this incredible offer, and say, “No! I don’t want to be your slave! I don’t want to be a slave to anyone! I want to be my own master!” What would happen? Would they be free? No. They would remain slaves to their cruel master. Why? Because they refused to submit to the one who bought them.

*That* is the way it is with salvation! Like slaves who have chosen to turn down the gracious offer of a new master who will free them from their misery, so apostates deny the Lord. How do they deny Him? By refusing His offer of salvation. By refusing *Him*. They’ve heard the truth, and they may even go along with some outward trappings of “Christianity.” Yet, they refuse to acknowledge that they deserve hell, and that there is nothing they can do to save themselves. They refuse to acknowledge that the One who bought them with His blood did everything necessary for them to be saved. They want to believe that their own good life is sufficient to earn their way to heaven. Furthermore, they want to be their own master. They don’t want to hand over their lives to Jesus, and do His will. They want to live their lives *their* way. And what is their end? Peter says that they bring “***swift destruction upon themselves.***” One day, the Lord will profess to them, “***Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.***”

**Conclusion:** As we close this morning, I would ask: Are *you* turning away from the offer of salvation? Are *you* turning away from the truth? You don't have to be an apostate *teacher* to be lost. All you have to do is deny Jesus. Are you pushing Him away? If so, do so no longer! He has bought you with His blood: however, you must *personally choose* to receive Him. If you are saved already, I would ask: **“Are you contending for the faith?”** Brethren, we are in a life-or-death battle! Satan wants to destroy as many souls as he can destroy. He wants to destroy Christians' testimony for God. He also wants to destroy this church. Christian, it is your responsibility to *know this Book*, so that you can fight the good fight. Should you be falling down in the battle, why not ask the Lord to help you to live for Him?