

The Opposite of Perseverance

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the nature of apostasy as the opposite of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints
2. aim – to cause us to stand firmly in faith under the work of God to hold us fast to himself
3. passage – 1 John 2:19

b. outline

1. The Definition of Apostasy
2. The Reality of Apostasy
3. The Warnings of Apostasy

c. opening

1. an **opposite** view of perseverance
 - a. sometimes it is valuable to understand a concept by looking at its opposite
 1. although, that doesn't work with the study of God (**i.e.** God has no opposite)
 - b. **apostasy is the opposite of perseverance** – studying the concept of apostasy will shed light on what perseverance really means, particularly in a robust, biblical soteriology

I. The Definition of Apostasy

Content

a. the definition of apostasy

1. apostasy (dictionary) = the abandonment or renunciation of a political or religious belief
 - a. political: to abandon a particular political core set of values or political expediencies
2. apostasy (biblical) =
 - a. religiously: to abandon or renounce a particular set of beliefs:
 1. because you never actually held them sincerely, and now realize it
 2. because your initial beliefs have been replaced by a new set
 3. because you have simply “drifted away” from what you once professed to believe
 - b. most religious apostasy is of that third kind: a slow drift away from an earlier profession of faith
 1. sometimes done consciously – a specific denunciation of a set of beliefs to embrace another
 - a. **e.g.** the kind of apostasy that happens when converting to Roman Catholicism
 2. typically not done consciously – for most, a steady slide away from what was once important
 - a. **e.g.** an initial rush of excitement that wanes over time, with no undergirding in growth

b. the opposite of perseverance

1. perseverance = the steady faithfulness of a true follower of Jesus Christ even through obstacles
2. apostasy = the immediate (or slow) abandonment of belief, very often **because of** obstacles

II. The Reality of Apostasy

Content

a. the reality of apostasy in certain religious groups

1. there are groups who insist that their adherents can apostatize and lose their salvation
 - a. Roman Catholics teach that one can renounce their baptism and lose their state of grace
 1. **i.e.** a mortal sin that would need to be restored through confession and penance
 - b. (some) Arminians teach a form of “conditional preservation” based on free will
 1. **i.e.** since salvation is a matter of personal freedom of choice, than the freedom to choose must be accompanied by the freedom to “un-choose” (or walk away freely)
2. the concept of “once saved, always saved” is implicitly held by many in non-Catholic circles
 - a. to teach that while one may not inherently “lose” their salvation, they can become so “backslidden” as to lose eternal rewards – thus, a lack of meaningful connection between faith and life

b. the reality of examples of apostasy in Scripture

1. (**for some**) the examples of apostasy in the Bible *imply* that it is possible for followers of Jesus Christ to lose their salvation, either implicitly or explicitly, through sin and/or neglect

2. some examples of biblical apostasy:
 - a. **1 Sam. 16:14** – King Saul who had turned from the Lord and the Spirit had left him
 1. although an O.T. example, about someone specifically chosen by God and gifted by the Spirit
 - b. **John 6:66** – many of Jesus’ disciples who had turned back and would no longer walk with him
 1. after Jesus speaks of the fact that only those “*granted by the Father*” would come to him
 - c. **Galatians 5:4** – members of the Galatian church who had abandoned justification by faith alone
 1. Paul said they had “*fallen away from grace*,” no longer embracing a key doctrine of the faith
 - d. **1 Tim. 1:19-20** – Hymenaeus and Alexander who had made “*shipwreck*” of their faith
 1. Paul turned them over (excommunicated them) to Satan to learn not to blaspheme
 - e. **2 Tim. 4:10** – Demas who had abandoned Paul because of his love of this present world
 1. he was overcome by materialism and the lust of the flesh so that he abandoned his teacher
 - f. **2 Peter 2:1-3** – the “*false prophets*” who had arisen amongst the people and drawn many away
 1. Peter compares the deceived to fallen angels, those who had gone apostate before God
- c. **the conclusion of the examples of apostasy in Scripture**
 1. **question:** do these examples prove that apostasy is *possible* for Christians? must we conclude from these examples that the idea of God always preserving those who trust in Christ (so that they persevere in faith to the end) is actually wishful thinking?
 - a. no, these examples prove nothing because they fail to address a root question: were the people in these examples really saved in the first place?
 2. apostasy is ***the opposite of perseverance in every way***
 - a. the assumption of this question (and the rejection of perseverance by some) is that these examples *start from the same place* (i.e. that they are not “fully” opposite)
 1. **LOW:** the examples assume a similar *starting place*, but an opposite *ending place*
 - b. **the doctrine of perseverance assumes that the starting place is a genuine conversion** – the one who perseveres to the end has *started* with a true regeneration, a conversion, a new birth in which the old heart of stone is removed and a new heart with God’s law upon it has been given
 1. apostasy comes from a *different starting place* – that the one who apostatizes does so because he or she has not actually been converted – there is no *internal* regeneration, no genuine faith
 3. apostasy (and perseverance) are the results of an ***ontological*** reality (**1 John 2:18-19**)

“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come ... 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 it might become plain that they all are not of us.”

 - a. the “antichrists” abandoned the church because they were not ***of*** the genuine substance
 - b. the “antichrists” had an *outward* appearance of faith (i.e. they joined the church), but not *internal*
 4. apostasy will be the result of ***all*** who have only an outward appearance of fidelity to Christ – the judgment of Christ will reveal all “implied” apostasy (**Matt. 5:15-16a, 21-23**)

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits ... Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

 - a. **note:** the removal of the restraining grace of God will reveal, at the judgment seat of Christ, all whose *outward* appearance fooled others into thinking they were genuinely saved

III. The Warnings of Apostasy

Content

- a. **the reality of warnings of apostasy in Scripture**
 1. **question:** if genuine Christians cannot fall away from an enduring and saving faith, then why are there warnings of apostasy in Scripture? what is their purpose for those who can understand them?
 2. **Mark 4:3-20** – in the parable of the sower and the seed, the warning is in the shallow or weedy soil
 - a. the warning that some will “germinate” in faith, but wither and die before producing genuine fruit
 3. **John 15:1-6** – in the analogy of the true vine, the warning is about branches that produce no fruit
 - a. the warning to those who are part of the vine, but do not “abide” in Jesus by producing fruit
 4. **Hebrews 6:4-8 (read)** – the warning of those who have “tasted” the things of Spirit, but fall away
 - a. the warning that restoration of such is impossible, for they are now hardened against the truth
- b. **the importance of warnings of apostasy in Scripture**
 1. to stand as a ***negative contrast*** to the *positive* imperatives to holiness scattered throughout the Bible
 - a. the *positive* commands of Scripture are designed to “prod” the Christian forward to holiness
 1. after all, the same question applies to these passages: if Christians cannot fall away from their state of election, then why the need for commands to holiness?
 - b. the *negative* warnings of Scripture are (also) designed to “prod” us forward
 1. they are simply *reverse images* of what is expected of us – commands in the form of warnings

2. therefore, although the truly regenerate person *cannot* fall away from God's special grace, the warnings are there to spur us on to good deeds, to move us away from laziness and indolence
 - a. and, the truly regenerate heart will not respond to these warnings as fatalistic
 - b. but, will respond as though these things *cannot be*, and will strive forward against them
- c. the conclusion regarding apostasy**
1. **those who are truly born again, have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, have become new creatures in Christ, with a new heart of flesh, cannot fall away from the work of God in electing and saving them, because the essence of their new nature precludes any such possibility**