

2020 in Hindsight: The Apostasy, Part One

Peter Ditzel

We've all heard the expression, "Hindsight is 2020." The past year was unquestionably one of the most alarming and catastrophic years in memory, so it would seem to be a good thing to look back on the year and see what God has been showing us. That's right, God, who "declare[s] the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:10), and, who in the Person of the Son, upholds "all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3), perfectly determined and controlled 2020 to be exactly what it was. And you can be sure that He did it all with purposes in mind. One of those purposes is particularly important for Christians, and that's what I'm going to focus on in this article.

In August of 2020, in "What Is God Doing in This Trouble?" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/what-is-god-doing/>), I stated several reasons God brought the trials of 2020 upon the Earth. Now, looking at 2020 in hindsight, I want to focus on this one objective: "God Is Using Trouble to Show Who's Who." Or, to put it another way, God used the events of 2020 to reveal a massive apostasy.

"True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure - the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature."

Robert McKee, Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting

In an observation directed toward writers, screenwriting guru Robert McKee explained something we can all learn from: "True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure - the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation, the truer the choice to the character's essential nature." In 2020, we were all put under intense pressure. That caused some Christians to draw closer to Jesus Christ. They realized that God has not lost control, and that He is continuing to work all things out for our good (Romans 8:28). By focusing on Christ, they saw His example of love for others, of putting

Copyright © 2021 wordofhisgrace.org

Permission is granted to reproduce this article only if reproduced in full with no alterations and keeping the copyright statement and this permission statement intact. Unless otherwise noted, Bible references are from the World English Bible (WEB).

2020-in-hindsight-the-apostasy-part-one.pdf

neighbors first, of submission to legitimate authority (John 19:11), of self-sacrifice.

On the other hand, the pressures of 2020 caused others to turn their eyes from Christ (if they ever really had their eyes on Him) in fear that they were losing control. They put their trust in political saviors and conspiracy theories. Instead of acting in self-sacrificial love, they put what they considered to be their individual rights first, they put the humanist-Enlightenment inspired U.S. Constitution ahead of the words of our Lord. Instead of submitting to legitimate authority, they rebelled. Instead of becoming a shining example of love, they showed the world their obsession with certain hot button political issues and demonstrated selfishness, greed, callousness, fear, hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, rivalry, division, heresy, party spirit, and idolatry for a man. Yet, they called themselves Christian.

God used 2020 to shine a bright light on, and bring into sharp focus, the heresies and falling away from the faith that had been creeping in the shadows for some time.

As we continue, please keep in mind that I'm not addressing politics as such. Yet, there can be no escaping the fact that the Republican Party and the Religious Right have been co-enablers of behavior grievous to the nation as a whole and antithetical to the heart of the Gospel itself. My point is that the stressors of 2020 caused people, who for years claimed to be Christians, to turn from core tenets of the faith of Jesus. I'm talking about the apostasy of American Christianity.

The Apostasy of American Christianity

This article will insult some people. That's not my goal, but I know it will happen. Jesus warned us not to offend people in the sense of turning them away from the faith. This article won't do that. In fact, it is the apostasy I'm writing about that turns many from the faith and toward a false religion. If this article steers even one of them back, I'll be happy. But offend is sometimes used as a synonym of insult. In that case, I'll point out that Jesus and the apostles did that all the time. So, I'm not afraid of insulting some people for the sake of saving others.

I've often written of how the Israel of the Old Covenant was a shadow or type of Christianity in the New Covenant age. But we mustn't think that the typology applies only to the good or neutral things. Israel became unfaithful to God; they apostatized. Just as much as the other typologies of the Old Testament, Israel's apostasy was a type of our age.

I've taught that Jesus' parables that begin with "The Kingdom of Heaven is like" or "To what shall I compare God's Kingdom?" are not about some future time of perfection. They speak of good and evil dwelling together. They speak of now, and from them we must learn to expect church corruption.

Reference: "[The Parable of the Tares of the Field](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/tares/)"
(<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/tares/>)

God's elect cannot be permanently deceived and forever fall away (Matthew 24:24; John 10:27-29). They are Christ's true *ekklēsia*, His assembly called out of the world. The elect may be turned out of the way for a time, but God will bring them back. Most apostasy, however, involves people who are not elect, who are not true members of the *ekklēsia*.

Apostasy Is Inevitable

Paul warned that Christ won't return unless certain things first happen. He writes, "Let no one deceive you in any way. For it will not be, unless the departure comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). "Departure" is translated from *apostasias*, apostasy. People who do not profess Christianity cannot apostatize. Paul is writing of a large number of professing Christians who become deceived or beguiled and depart from the faith. Perhaps some of these people are elect, and they will come to their senses. But, in what is generally called the church, there are many false brethren. These people are not elect.

Paul's use of the phrase, "In any way," is more important than it might seem because it implies using means we may not expect. For example, things may be preached from pulpits and declared in political rallies that won't sound warning bells to many. They'll seem appealing to professing Christians who have their eyes off Jesus Christ. For example, what if the man of sin were to say, "I'll stand against abortion," "I'll protect your children from the transgender agenda," "I'll promote family values," "I'll make sure marriage is defined as one man and one woman," "I'll nominate conservative judges," "I'll build a strong economy," "I'll support law and order and defend our police"?

Let's get this straight. These issues are not the Gospel. They are not even part of Christianity. Jesus did not tell us to stand for family values or even to defend unborn children. Abortion and infanticide were common in the first century, but neither Jesus nor any New Testament writers ever said anything about

them. They also never told us to push our morals on others. They told us to love, to be at peace with all men, and to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:20-21).

Jesus' solution to the sins of the world was not to condemn sinners or to try to outlaw their sins. His answer was to die for the sins of those who believe on Him and to end the law and its condemnation. He saved His criticism for the scribes, the Pharisees, and the lawyers, the religious leaders of His day who put legal burdens on the people (Matthew 23:4) and looked for praise (Matthew 23:6-7). The Evangelical political platform confuses the Gospel with using law (God's and man's) to control behavior and replaces grace with morality and the traditions of men.

The End Is Marked by Apostasy

Jesus asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find [the] faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8b). I inserted "the" before "faith" because it is in the Greek. Yet, most English translations omit it. Jesus is referring to the core belief or trust in Him. Jesus leaves the question unanswered, but it certainly reinforces Paul's assertion of apostasy at the end.

Matthew 25:31-46 pictures Jesus' return as a time when He will separate the sheep from the goats. And what does this passage say distinguishes the sheep from the goats? Primarily, the very fact that they are inherently sheep and goats. But a characteristic of the sheep is their love for others. Is this love a self-righteous work? No! The love is a fruit that shows that these are the sheep who are led by the Good Shepherd (John 10), and these are the branches who are firmly in Jesus the Vine and in whom Jesus abides and who bear much fruit (John 15:1-8).

What does all of this have to do with 2020? Plenty.

In 2020, We Saw That:

IT IS VERY EASY FOR AN ENORMOUS NUMBER OF PROFESSING CHRISTIANS TO FALL INTO APOSTASY

I'd been watching the sheepskin-garbed wolves creeping through the pasture for many years—and in 2016, I warned that Christian Conservatism or the Religious Right is "The Greatest Heresy of Our Time" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/greatest-heresy/>). Still, I was surprised at how the troubles of the past year coupled with the U.S. Presidential elections so distinctly revealed who was who. It was as if, on a dark night, God had unexpectedly turned a giant spotlight on the masses of professing Christians.

He exposed the wolves without their sheep's clothing leading the goats in an orgiastic dance around the golden calf of Conservative politics.

In 2020, the church in America came disturbingly close to the end-time apostasy that follows the man of sin described in 2 Thessalonians 2. Will this continue in 2021? The storming of the Capitol was certainly not encouraging.

Of course, there have been historical apostasies before. But we're now seeing the creation of a hybrid religion blending a selfish and individualistic "Christianity" with Republican and Libertarian politics, nationalism, patriotism, and individualism.

"Citing Scripture, Pence switches out Jesus for the American flag in convention speech"

(<https://religionnews.com/2020/08/27/citing-scripture-pence-switches-out-jesus-for-the-american-flag-in-convention-speech/>)

PROFESSING CHRISTIAN LEADERS ARE WILLING TO PROSTITUTE THEMSELVES TO POLITICAL LEADERS TO GAIN POLITICAL POWER.

I know this is similar to what I've already said, but I can't emphasize it enough. Evangelical leaders have fawned over Donald Trump since the 2016 election campaign, and this reached a near frenzy in 2020.



Figure 1 U.S. President Donald Trump and his "courtiers" of Evangelical leaders.

I found this quote and others like it to be especially revealing of who apostatized:

John MacArthur to President Trump: "...any real, true believer is going to be on your side in this election" ("California pastor told Trump: 'Any real, true believer' will vote for him over Biden") (<https://www.foxnews.com/faith-values/california-pastor-told-trump-any-real-true-believer-will-vote-for-him-over-biden>). In that statement, John MacArthur defined a true believer as a supporter of Donald Trump. Someone who does not support Donald Trump cannot be a true believer. If that isn't heresy and outright apostasy from the faith, what is?

"Theologian Russell Moore Has a Message for Christians Who Still Worship Donald Trump"

(<https://time.com/5932014/donald-trump-christian-supporters/>)

Read John 19:11: "Jesus answered, 'You would have no power at all against me, unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered me to you has greater sin.'" Pilate had legitimate civil authority from God through Caesar. He who delivered Jesus to Pilate was Caiaphas, the high priest. He didn't have the civil authority, so he tried to use his religious position to bring political pressure on Pilate. This was an abuse of his position and condemned him. Does using one's standing as a religious leader to influence the civil authority sound familiar to you? Do you know that the Jewish religious leaders

also swayed the people to vote for Barabbas and against Jesus? (Matthew 27:15-23).

What sort of witness are we giving to unbelievers if, along with the Gospel, we present a Christianity that supports a political platform they don't agree with? And, that's a best-case scenario. The Gospel is often entirely buried under the political issues.

In part 2, I'm going to point out how the COVID-19 pandemic brought out the worst in the apostate church and discuss patriotism and the core objectives of Conservative Christianity.