

## Apostasy in the Christian church



Article written by [Matt Slick](#)

"Let no one in any way deceive you, for it [Jesus' return] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction," (2 Thess. 2:3, NASB).

Apostasy means to fall away from the truth. Therefore, an apostate is someone who has once believed and then rejected the truth of God. Apostasy is a rebellion against [God](#) because it is a rebellion against [truth](#). In the Old Testament, God warned the Jewish people about their idolatry and their lack of trust in Him. In the New Testament, the epistles warn us about not falling away from the truth. Apostasy is a very real and dangerous threat.

The verse at the top of the page tells us that there will be an apostasy that is associated with the appearance of the [Antichrist](#). Most Christians are looking for the arrival of the Antichrist, but very few are looking for "the apostasy" that must come first. The arrival of the Antichrist cannot occur until sufficient apostasy has happened in the world. The Antichrist, who is the ultimate of liars, cannot abide in a world where the truth of God's Word is taught. This is why the Bible says that the apostasy will come first and then the Antichrist will be revealed.

Therefore, we must, as Christians, ask this question, "Is there an apostasy occurring in the Christian church today?" Some would say no and others yes. But, as we look for the arrival of the Antichrist, should we not also be looking for the arrival of apostasy? And where else should we first look but in our own house for the Bible tells us that judgment will begin in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17).

If there is indeed an apostasy occurring in the Christian Church, we would not know it unless we first examined the Bible closely and then compared the present-day Church to the Word of God. It is only after a standard of truth is established that we would then have a measuring rod by which apostasy can be detected. Therefore, I propose the following list of Biblical truths as a sample of essential Christian and non-essential doctrines by which we might compare other teachings and phenomena. Note this is not absolute, and the nuances of several topics can be debated since not all will agree with the categorization of all points. Still, we need to use the Bible as our standard, and it gives us plenty of information by which we can know what the truth really is.

**Primary Essentials (Nature and work of Christ)--Cannot deny and be Christian since they are explicitly stated as required in Scripture.**

Jesus is both God and man (John 1:1, 14, 8:24, Col. 2:9, 1 John 4:1-4).

Jesus rose from the dead physically (John 2:19-21).

Salvation is by grace through faith (Rom. 5:1, Eph. 2:8-9, Gal. 5:1-5).

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4, Gal. 1:8-9).

There is only one God (Exodus 20:1-3, Isaiah 43:10, 44:6, 8)

**Secondary Essentials--(Nature of God) Cannot deny and be Christian.**

- God exists as a Trinity of persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (See [Trinity](#))]
- Virgin Birth of Jesus--relates to incarnation of Christ as God and man.

**Primary Non-Essentials (Bible, Church ordinances, and practice)--Denial does not void salvation yet principles are clearly taught in Scripture. Denial suggests apostasy.**

Male eldership and pastorate (1 Tim. 2:12-13, 3:15, Titus 1:5-7).

Fidelity in marriage in heterosexual relationships (1 Cor. 6:9).

The condemnation of homosexuality (Rom. 1:26-27).

Inerrancy of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16).

**Secondary Non-Essentials--does not affect one's salvation relationship with God. Debated within Christianity. Denial or acceptance does not suggest apostasy.**

- Baptism for adults or infants.
- Predestination, election, and free will.
- Communion every week, monthly, or quarterly, etc.
- Saturday or Sunday Worship.
- Worship with or without instruments, traditional or contemporary.
- Pre-tribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, post-tribulation rapture.
- Premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.
- Continuation or cessation of the charismatic gifts.
- Etc.

Of course, the non-essentials are debatable (which unfortunately leads to denominational fragmentation). But by way of explanation, the Primary Essentials are those doctrines that the Bible states if they are denied, damnation follows. I have written on this in [Essential Doctrines](#). For brevity, the Bible states that if you deny Jesus is God, you are dead in your sins (John 8:24, 58, cf. Exodus 3:14), if you deny Jesus' physical resurrection, your faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15:14, cf. John 2:19-21), if you add works to salvation, you are not in Christ (Gal. 3:1-3, 5:1-4) and that if you preach a gospel contrary to what the apostles preached, you are accursed (Gal. 1:8-9, cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Therefore, to deny any of these doctrines, according to Scripture, is to be outside the camp of Christ and invited eternal damnation. This would obviously be apostasy.

The Secondary Essentials are essentials that further clarify orthodoxy, but there is no explicitly Scriptural statement regarding each (that I am aware of) which states that denying them results in damnation the way the Primary Essentials do. The Secondary Essentials deal primarily with the nature of God. The fact that there is one God who is a [Trinity](#) is clearly essential to Christian orthodoxy, but there is no Scriptural statement stating that to believe in the Trinity is necessary for salvation. However, that does not mean that denial of the Trinity is acceptable. A person can be saved without knowing about the Trinity. But, since the Trinity is a Biblical truth and the believer is indwelt by the [Holy Spirit](#) who bears witness of truth, a true Christian will not openly denounce the Trinity once he has been taught it from Scripture. So, it could be said that the Secondary Essentials are essentials to the faith as well as the Primary Essentials are.

The Primary Non-Essentials are Biblical teachings that if denied do not affect one's salvation. But, because the Bible teaches them, denying them is a sign of apostasy. The Secondary Non-Essentials do not affect one's position with God, nor do they affirm or deny Biblical teaching since they are debatable. Having differing beliefs in these is not a sign of apostasy--just differences of opinion. Again, I am aware that the categorization of the non-essentials is debatable, but I must draw the line somewhere. Sadly, it is in Secondary non-essential doctrines that most denominational fragmentation occurs. This is a sad display that most division occurs over that which is least important. Furthermore, I believe that it is in the area of the Non-Essentials that apostasy can first be detected.

## 2 Thessalonians 2

As quoted above, there is a prophecy in 2 Thessalonians about a coming apostasy that is associated with the disclosure of the anti-Christ.

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Have you been looking for the coming of the anti-Christ? Are you waiting for him to pop up on the world scene? If you are, are you also looking for the related apostasy? Most Christians are looking for the anti-Christ but are not looking for signs of apostasy.

The Bible is God's Word, and it tells us what is right and wrong. To the degree that anyone disagrees with the truths of God's Word, to that same degree they are falling away from it. What, then, might be some of the signs of apostasy? I've compiled a representative list of issues. You may or may not agree with all of these, but I provide them as food for thought.

**Denial of basic Christian doctrines such as the [Trinity](#), the [deity of Christ](#), the deity of the [Holy Spirit](#), [salvation by grace](#), and moral absolutes as found in the Bible. ]**

- God's Word is true. Deviation from the basics of its truth is surely apostasy.

Countless denominational divisions that contradict John 13:35 and 1 Cor. 1:10.

Of course, there are bound to be divisions in the body of Christ and differences of opinions are permitted (Rom. 14:1-12). But, the amount of divisions in the Church is ridiculous and contrary to Col. 3:14.

### **Ordination of homosexuals.**

Homosexuality is clearly condemned in God's Word (Lev. 18:22, 1 Cor. 6:9). To ordain homosexuals into ministry is clearly contrary to Biblical truth and clearly apostasy.

### **Women elders and pastors.**

Whether people like it or not in this politically correct environment, the Bible does not support [women as elders or as pastors](#) (1 Tim. 2:12-14, 3:2, Titus 1:5-7). Men are called to be leaders in the church. The fact that women elders and pastors exist is a sign that men are not doing their God-given job.

- Also, if you believe in women pastors and elders, do not dismiss this article. You must always examine yourself to see if what you believe is Biblical.

Not preaching the gospel per 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins. It is not a message of convenience or embarrassment. Do not

be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).

#### **Using the Lord's name in vain, something a surprising number of Christians do.**

- God's name and title are to be used only by Christians in a reverent and respectful manner and never in casual exclamation. Just because the sinners do it, does not mean it is okay for the Christians.

Not sending out or failing to support missionaries (or cutting back unnecessarily) in violation of Matt. 28:18-20.

- Carrying out the Great Commission is the command of Jesus. Any church that is able to support missionary work and does not is in direct violation of Christ's command in the Great Commission.

#### **Marketing and merchandising.**

- Those in ministry should make a living from their labor. Churches should seek to spread the gospel best they can and selling things to do it is acceptable. But, how many trinkets and bobbles are offered in the name of Christ that do not honor God but are merely for the purpose of financial gain? Is the duty of the church business or the gospel? Remember how Jesus cleansed the temple?

#### **Pastors who are more concerned with growing a church than preaching the truth.**

- Whoever and wherever they are, they need to repent. Pastors must stand on the truth of God's Word even if it costs them financially and materially.

#### **Pastors who don't pray and seek God's face.**

- Of course, this should be rare. But, any pastor who does not seek God's face in humility is seeking to do a job, not a ministry, under his own power.

#### **Pastors who cave in to pressures from the church in contradiction to the Word of God.**

- Any pastor who does this should repent now or step down from the pulpit. Pastors are to stand upon and for God's Word, no matter what the obstacles or the cost.

#### **Pastors who fail to equip their congregations according to God's Word.**

Pastors are called to equip the Christian for the work of the ministry in all aspects of life (Eph. 4:11): apologetics, evangelism, missionary work, prayer, service, love, etc. Far too many congregations are not being equipped with even the [basics of Christianity](#) and are instead being taught political correctness.

#### **Pastors who don't teach damnation.**

- We are not saying that you must preach fire and brimstone all the time. But the fact is the gospel that offends no one is not the gospel of the Bible. The truth of the gospel is that people will face damnation. This is part of the Christian message, and it should be part of Christian preaching.

### **Christians gathering teachers to themselves to make them feel good.**

- Is comfort or truth the primary objective for the Christians? Are we divine in nature or sinners saved by grace? Do we deserve to be saved, or are we saved by God's free choice? Christians who want merely to be entertained and comforted from the pulpit are still children. They should be challenged to grow and take risks.

### **Evolution**

- Denominations that either adopt evolutionary principles or refuse to take a stand on evolution.

Apostasy is all around us in varying degrees. As Christians, we need to be very sure that we are clinging to the truth of God's Word and resisting the inclusion of liberalism, moral relativism, and the oncoming secularism that is all around us. We need to stand on the Word of God and never be ashamed of the truth of the Gospel:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek". Romans 1:16

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