

Religion without Relationship

People all over our country worship and belong to a religion their entire lives, yet lack a relationship with God. Who are these people? Apostates. They are those who hear the gospel, are enlightened, profess to be Christians, become identified with a Christian church, and then abandon their profession of faith, decisively renounce Christ, desert the Christian fellowship, and take their place among the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ. Said another way, they believe the Gospel but have never committed themselves to that faith. They may even continue to attend church, yet they have never truly trusted and put their full faith in Jesus Christ, accepting Him as Savior and Lord and turning fully and wholeheartedly to Him. Additionally, knowing the truth and refusing to accept it invites a worse judgment than not knowing it. It's a sin that only unbelievers can commit, namely, knowingly, willfully, and maliciously turning against the Lord. It should not be confused with the sin of an unbeliever who hears the gospel but does nothing about it. For instance, a man or woman may fail to respond to Christ despite repeated invitations from the Holy Spirit, yet they are not apostates. They can still be saved if they commit themselves to the Savior. Of course, if they die in unbelief, they are lost forever, but they are not hopeless as long as they are alive and able to exercise faith in the Lord. Additionally, apostasy should not be confused with a true believer who may wander or stray very far from Christ. Like the prodigal son, they may have their fellowship with God shattered by their sin. They may even reach the point where they are no longer recognized as Christians. Yet they can be restored to full fellowship as soon as they confess and forsake their sins. **1 John 1:9:** *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* Apostasy is not the same as the unpardonable sin mentioned in the Gospels. That sin was attributing the miracles of the Lord Jesus to the prince of demons, Beelzebub (**Matthew 12:24, Mark 3:22, and Luke 11:15**). The Pharisees observed Jesus as He miraculously healed a demon-possessed man. Instead of acknowledging God's power, they accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub and of using demonic power to perform the miracle. Jesus' miracles were performed in the power of the Holy Spirit. Attributing them to the devil was tantamount to blaspheming the Holy Spirit. It implied that the Holy Spirit was the devil. Jesus said that such a sin could never be forgiven, either in that age or in the age to come. (**Mark 3:22-30**). Apostasy is similar to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in that it is an eternal sin, but the resemblance ends there. The apostle John wrote about people who had professed to be believers, then joined the Gnostics' false teaching and maliciously left the Christian fellowship. **1 John 2:19:** *"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us."* Their deliberate departure indicated they had never truly been born again; they are not true believers and never were. They were pretenders. The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (**Matthew 13:24-30**) offers an

illustration of apostasy. In the same field, wheat and “false wheat” (*tares or weeds*) grew together. At first, the difference between the two was undetectable, but over time, the weeds became apparent for what they were. In the same way, in any given church today, there may be true, born-again believers side by side with pretenders: those who enjoy the messages, the music, and the fellowship but have never repented of their sins and accepted Christ by faith. To any human observer, the true believer and the pretender appear identical. Only God can see the heart. Those who openly deny that Jesus is the Christ have committed the sin leading to death. **1 John 2:22:** *“Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist, denying the Father and the Son.”* Some sincere Christians are troubled when they read **Hebrews 6** and similar passages. **Hebrews 6:4-8:** *“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and produces vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.”* Satan especially uses these verses to unsettle believers facing physical, mental, or emotional difficulties. They fear they have fallen away from Christ and that there is no hope of restoration. They worry they have drifted beyond redemption’s point. Their very concern is conclusive evidence that they are not apostates! An apostate would not have such fears; they would brazenly reject Christ. Jesus clearly warns us in **Matthew 24:10-13:** *“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.”* As we approach the end of this age, we can expect a rising tide of apostasy. Those with full knowledge of the truth deliberately turn away from Christ, renounce Him, and trample on every fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. **1 Timothy 4:1:** *“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.”* The Bible says it is impossible to restore such a one to repentance, and experience confirms this. History shows that many have apostatized from Christ, yet none has ever returned to Him.