

7. WILL GOD SAVE MY UNCLE?

Postscript:- When Christians Abandon Their Faith

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Then Jesus said to the Twelve, **“Will you also leave me?”** (John 6: 67)

Up to this point Jesus had been constantly thronged by massive crowds where he and his disciples were hardly able to find time to eat, much less take a day off for a little R & R. Indeed, only a few verses earlier the people had tried to *forcefully* crown him as their king (John 6: 15).

But now, after some hard sayings and problematic teaching, the crowds were deserting Jesus in droves, for we read that, **from this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him** (John 6: 66). Jesus' whole mission appears sunk in the water.

Jesus plaintively turns to his innermost circle, **the Twelve**, and with sadness in his voice asks, **“Will you also leave me?”** Will you also abandon ship?

AS IT WAS THEN, SO IT IS NOW

The phenomenon of followers of Jesus abandoning their faith and **turning back to no longer follow** him has always been an historical reality. As early as **the Parable of the Sower** Jesus knew that the demands of discipleship would mean that **many would believe for a while, but in time of testing they fall away** (Lk 8: 13).

The catalyst for my own uncle's case of abandoning his Christian faith, you will recall, was a despicable, insensitive comment from a church leader, no less.

OUR SUMMARY SO FAR

We have examined the three main possibilities awaiting the destiny of people who die without a vital faith in the Gospel of the Christ of God. We have seen they will either **burn on ---** in everlasting conscious torment (**Infernalism**); or they will **burn up ---** to extinction after the Judgment (**Conditionalism**); or they will **burn through ---** after a series of corrective judgments to finally be reconciled to God (**Universal Salvation**).

As far as I am concerned, I would describe myself as being a **Reformed Infernalist** (I no longer subscribe to the everlasting torment of the lost), a **Reluctant Conditionalist** (I think God Himself is one of these for He says multiple times, **“I, the Sovereign LORD have no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18: 23, 32; 33:11)**), and a **Disappointed Universalist** (I think God is one of these too, for He invites all humanity into His eternal kingdom, but this appears to be a forlorn hope as far as the Scriptural evidence goes).

TODAY'S GROWING TREND TO ABANDON THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

According to recent surveys there has been a growing exodus out from under the umbrella that we know as Christianity. Very concerning are the so-called “high profile” Christian leaders who have also been jumping ship. I only have space here to name a few recent ones.

Dr Paul Maxwell, former Moody Bible Institute Professor and author of *Desiring God* has now turned his back on the God of the Bible. **Maxwell** said on his Instagram feed; I think it's important to say that I'm just not a Christian anymore, and it feels really good. I'm really happy ... I'm in a really good spot. Probably the best spot of my life. I'm so full of joy for the first time. I love my life.

In July 2019, **Josh Harris**, popular Christian author of the bestseller *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, made the following statement on his Instagram post: I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is “deconstruction,” the biblical phrase is “falling away.” By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.

In August of the same year, **Marty Sampson**, popular Christian songwriter for Hillsong wrote something similar on his Instagram post: I'm genuinely losing my faith, and it doesn't bother me. Like, what bothers me now is nothing. I am so happy now, so at peace with the world. It's crazy. ... How many preachers fall? Many. No one talks about it. How many miracles happen. Not many. No one talks about it.

Abraham Piper, son of the influential American pastor **John Piper** has recently become an internet sensation with his video posts now mocking his former Christian up-bringing. As **reported** by **Ruth Graham** for the **New York Times**,

“Abraham Piper became a sensation on TikTok nearly overnight. He posted his first video in November, and he now has more than 900,000 followers, many of them young people who thank him for capturing their experiences so precisely. His unlikely path to online stardom: irreverent critiques of evangelical Christianity aimed at others who have left the faith.” ⁽¹⁾

Just by the way, I cannot imagine what high hopes his Christian father and mother had for their son when he was born. They called him “**Abraham**”! Of course, **Abraham** in the Bible was the friend of God, “**the Father of the faithful**”! Concerning **Abraham** God said, “**I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just ... (Gen. 18: 19).**”

I am positive that like many godly parents, Pastor **John Piper** and his wife named their son with similar high hopes. I am sure they have prayed constantly for their son since

¹ Legion are the numbers of Preacher's Kids (PK's) who have abandoned the faith of their Christian parents. Another high-profile name in this category would be **Franky Schaeffer**, the son of the world-renowned **Francis Schaeffer** whom I referred to in the fourth article of this series, **4. Will God Save My Uncle? Some Reflections on “The Wider Hope”**. **Franky** is also very active on Social Media being critical of his famous father's Christian faith.

his defection. Their story is repeated multiple times around the world this very hour. Oh, the cries that ascend to God in heaven above, “O Lord, bring our sons and our daughters home to You again!”

Like the father in Jesus’ story of [The Prodigal Son](#) many dads and mums sit on the front porch looking down the road with tears filled with yearning love for their wayward sons and daughters --- hoping, *hoping*, hoping, that in [that far country](#) their own flesh and blood may come to their senses and turn for home again (my own grandfather did this for decades where his son, my dear uncle was concerned).

Sure, I know that Christians losing their faith is not a new phenomenon. There has always been falling away, apostasy. But of course, with modern media it becomes instant world-wide news when a “big name” Christian abandons the faith.

It’s easy to get things skewed and out of perspective. I mean, do we ever hear about the many agnostics, atheists, socialists, humanists, anarchists, activists and so on, who are actually turning *to* Christ on a regular basis? That’s not reported, not big news to the world, so slips under the radar.

I am often reminded of the time when the prophet [Elijah](#) was feeling all alone and depressed, all holed-up in a cave and asking God to end his life because the cause seemed lost. God told him, “[Hey Elijah, chin up! I have at this very moment thousands hidden away who have not bowed their knees to Baal and who are loyal to Me! You are not the Lone Ranger, mate!](#)” (Yes, I have taken a bit of liberty with the Aussie lingo here, but if [Elijah](#) had happened to be an Australian, that’s how God would have addressed him, I’m sure.) ([1 Kings 19: 9-18](#))

Certainly, in the West, Christian values have been increasingly and relentlessly criticised in the mainstream media, in social media, in the legislatures, in the courts, in the workplace, in the schools and universities --- indeed, in every corner of our culture.

THE PERFECT STORM

Whilst there have always been those sad cases who feel God has personally let them down --- “[I prayed for my child to be healed but God let me down!](#)” or, “[I read this book about all the contradictions in the Bible and I can’t answer those questions](#)”, or, as in the case of my dear uncle, “[If you really were a child of God then how could this tragedy have come upon you?](#)” etc.) --- I think it’s fair to say the Good Ship “Church” has in our generation hit the perfect storm.

WHY ARE CROWDS ABANDONING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TODAY?

There has been a convergence, a confluence of cross-currents reaching a crescendo where the crowds are abandoning the Christian faith in increasing numbers;

1). We could talk about the almost universal acceptance of **Darwinian Evolution**. The idea that inanimate matter sprang to life and by “natural selection” has gone from mud to man, from goo to you *via* the zoo, from germs to genius, seems to be the explanatory “miracle” that multitudes are pinning their worldview on.

Who said miracles don't happen? I mean, evolutionists are talking about intelligent life that has evolved “unguided” into the conscious ability to know itself! Human beings have the incredible capacity to objectify ourselves in the material universe. Aren't inanimate minerals so clever as to have organised themselves to self-awareness!

It seems that, when faced with the choice of either believing Christ who said that God created Adam & Eve in the beginning to be His image-bearers, or to believing that we are 95% DNA of chimps, that millions opt for the spin of the latter. What chumps!

What a convenient hypothesis. For, if I believe I am an accidental animal then I can convince myself I may live any way I like. There are no eternal consequences on that score because I will not have to stand before that **Great White Throne** to give an account of my deeds!

But, try as they might, the Darwinian Evolutionist knows deep down that we live in a moral universe guided by certain absolute standards. To prove this, all we need do is ask the evolutionist, “**Do you believe it's okay to physically torture little children?**” Of course they are unanimous with moral outrage. Such outrage is proof God has put His universal moral compass within their hearts.

2). Another very recent factor leading to the mass exodus of people from Christianity (at least in the USA) would include the **Failed Prophecies of President Donald Trump's Re-election**.

Those of us who live outside of the USA may be oblivious to the many well-publicised prophecies circulating before the November 2020 presidential elections in the States. If you doubt me, just **Google** something like “**Failed Prophecies about Trump's Re-election**”. You will see a plethora of headlines with over 4,440,000 results to date!

Since **President Biden's** inauguration, some of these “prophets” have reluctantly admitted they got it wrong. Some are still predicting **Trump** will arise again. But the damage has been done. Thousands and thousands apparently have been so disillusioned to the point of deciding that Christianity is not for them. (²)

3). Another factor in the mass exodus from the “Church” has been **Priests, Paedophilia and Sex-Scandals**. Who can estimate the damage and the hurt of the well-publicised (not to mention the unpublicised) crimes “the established Church” has committed on the innocent? It's disgusting, it's deplorable, it's outrageous and it's sickening.

² Another exercise you might like to give **Google** is to ask **How the Trump Administration Has Harmed Christian Faith**.

Who can measure the feelings of betrayal, guilt and uncleanness which multitudes of innocent altar boys and children of both sexes in church orphanages and schools have endured? This is a stench that has reached the heart of our holy heavenly Father that will not go unpunished (do I hear an “Amen!” from my evolutionist friends??).

Our Lord himself warned that those who cause such **offence** (the Greek word is our word *scandal*) to one of these **little ones**, that **it would be better** if that wicked perpetrator had **a great millstone fastened** around their neck and that they were **drowned in the depth of the sea** (Matt. 18: 6).

He also said that, **if the salt has lost its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men** --- condemned by the world (Matt. 5: 13).

When it comes time to give an accounting before God, it won't do to use the hypocrite as an excuse --- “**There are too many hypocrites in the Church!**” Listen. *If you put the hypocrite before God then the hypocrite is nearer to God than you are!* We must answer for ourselves, each one, and not the hypocrite who will answer for himself or herself anyway.

4.) The last factor I will mention that has caused multitudes to turn away from the Church has been **Denominational Doctrinal Disunity**. I have come across more than I can remember who have said something like, “**Who can I believe? There are just so many contradictory interpretations of the Bible out there. There is so much in-fighting between the denominations. How can I make any sense out of this confusing cacophony?**”

Thankfully, in the West at least, we do not live in a society at present that burns “heretics” and that thinks by physically torturing and killing people **they are doing God a service** (Matt. 24: 9).

It's inevitable that multitudes of nominal Christians who have never had a genuine relationship with Christ would fall away from church with our culture's increasing secularisation and divisions.

Whilst the many who turn away from the only sure ground of salvation in Christ can cause us to be discouraged --- and especially if it is those of one's own family --- nevertheless because the Bible predicts it will be so in the end times, the very phenomenon itself should fortify our souls. Jesus predicted, **When the Son of Man comes will he find [the] faith on the earth?** (Lk 18: 8).

And again our Lord warned his disciples, that just prior to his Return **many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other** (Matt. 24: 10).

That day [of his Coming] will not come except there comes a falling away first ... (2 Thess. 2: 3). And this, **The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons** (I Tim. 4: 1).

One of the indications we are living in the days not long before our Lord's glorious *Parousia* is the current prophesied widespread **apostasy**.

But what about those who appear to have had a *genuine* love for the Lord and who have had lives that seem to have demonstrated a *genuine* repentance and life-changing conversion to the Gospel? (³)

It would appear that Jesus' question must be pressed with urgency, "**Will you also leave me?**" And don't forget it was a near thing for the apostle Peter who himself denied his friend and Lord **with curses** and with an **oath**, "**I know not the man!**"

But see how Peter and the Church benefitted from his faith-failure. No longer the self-confident Peter, he is now ready to hear Jesus' renewed commission: "**And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers**" (Lk 22:32). And he did.

We talked a lot at the end of my last article about the finality of **The Lake of Fire**. It is worth noting just who will be cast into that fiery furnace which is the Second Death;

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars --- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Rev. 21: 8).

Notice it is not only the vile and blatant sinners --- murderers, the sexually immoral, all liars, etc. --- who will perish. Observe that *the first* on the list are **the cowardly** coupled with **the unbelieving**. *This is the very same word-order Jesus used to describe the fearful disciples who thought their boat was going down in the midst of the tempest on the sea!*

Before calming the winds and the sea, Jesus directly asked his disciples, "**Why are you so fearful, O men of little faith?**" (Matt. 8: 26; Mk 4: 40). Jesus actually asked, "Why are you so **cowardly**?" (⁴) You will note that both those who are thrown into **the Lake of Fire** and those Jesus rebukes in the boat, have the same words in the exact same order: It is cowardice that leads to little faith that can eventually lead to unbelief, which, unless repented of, leads straight to the furnace!

Unbelief, says the Bible, is the inevitable product of cowardice. Conversely, the courage to choose to trust and obey God will produce the kind of faith that conquers and overcomes the world (I John 5: 4).

Listen to God's own testimony concerning those who abandon their faith in His Son, "**But My righteous one will live by faith, but if he shrinks back , My soul will have no pleasure in him**". And then listen to the writer who draws his own lesson from that

³ In this article I am not so much asking whether a Christian can lose their salvation or not. I have dealt with this question in the ARTICLES subsection on *Practical Christian Living*. They are titled *1. Once Saved, Always Saved?* and *2. Can a Christian Lose Eternal Life?* You could also try *2. Are Christ's Sheep Automatically Safe?*

⁴ The *δειλοῖς* are the timid, those whose eyes are on the danger rather than the Lord.

word, **But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved (Hebrews 10: 38-39). (⁵) (⁶)**

Observe the context of this statement about a faith that is cowardly to the point of **shrink[ing] back to perdition** concerns the Second Coming of Jesus. The writer reminds us that we must **persevere** in doing **the will of God** because we **will be richly rewarded ... in just a very little while** when **he who is coming will come and will not delay (v. 35).**

To me at least, this is rather sobering! Oh, let us daily pray for the courage to take up our cross and to be fully identified with Jesus in his rejection by the world so that we do not forfeit the rewards promised to the faithful who will enter the kingdom of God. May we **remain/continue in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming/presence (I John 2: 28).**

My prayer is that I would be given grace to not fear what man may say or do to me, but to fear/revere the LORD God first and foremost (see **Lk 12: 4f**). If I read Scripture rightly, many will be those who were cowards because they put the fear of man above the fear of the Almighty.

That said, it must also be added, that there is no shame in admitting that our faith has been severely tested to the point of abandoning the Lord Jesus and his Gospel altogether. I wouldn't think there is any real Christian believer who has loved and trusted the Lord with all their heart who has not gone through a season of serious darkness and doubt as to their standing before God. I have.

If you have not been plunged into the stormy sea and felt the wind of doubt whipping around your ears, if you have not felt yourself sinking into the waves only to discover the Lord's saving power as he lifted you back into the boat, how do you know if you have a genuine faith or not? Only a tested faith is proved genuine, for it comes out of the smelter as pure gold (**First Peter 1: 7**).

Yes, these are days when multitudes are abandoning Christ for all sorts of reasons. And I hear Jesus asking with loving pathos in his voice again, **"Will you also go away?"**

May our hearts echo Peter's reply, **"Lord, to whom else can we go, for you have the words of eternal life?"** May we determine by God's help never to **shrink back and so be lost.**

⁵ The **"and so are lost"** of the NRSV reads **and so are destroyed** in the NIV and, in the KJV and NKJV as, **unto perdition.**

⁶ The Greek word for **shrink back** (**ὑποστέλλω/hypostellō**) may equally well be translated as; to be timid, to hesitate from fear, to cower, to withdraw. You get the idea!

