

FORGET NONE OF HIS BENEFITS, *volume 6, number 17, April 26, 2007*

And Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Him to them, Mark 14:10.

Apostasy

How could Judas do it? How could he betray his friend, the One who called him to be an apostle, the One whom he had served for three years? To be sure others in Scripture had been betrayed- Demas left Paul for this present world. Many left Jesus in John 6:66 after His strong message, refusing to follow Him any longer. But this is so much worse. Consider the marvelous privileges Judas had. He had seen Jesus heal lepers, cast out demons, raise people from the dead, walk on water, feed the 5000, calm a storm, preach profound sermons. He also seemed to have impeccable integrity. After all, he was given responsibility to handle the disciples' money. You don't appoint Treasurer of your church or business one even remotely suspect in character. We are told later that Judas pilfered the money box, but no one knew it at the time. So, how could this happen? To be sure, Jesus refers to Judas in His prayer of John 17 as the son of perdition, and in Mark 14:49 Jesus told the mob who apprehended Him that this was in fulfillment of prophecy, meaning Judas was foreordained for this gruesome deed. Nonetheless, he was responsible for his actions. He was not a robot. He made the decision to betray Jesus.

Be sure of this sober truth- you have the seeds of apostasy in your soul. Therefore you are to be vigilant, knowing that your adversary the devil is like a roaring lion, roaming about, seeking to devour whomever he may. How are you to stand against apostasy, leaving the faith? After all, isn't betrayal the very essence of apostasy? Consider this- if you are trusting in anything but Jesus to keep from it, then you may well fail. You have marvelous Christian privileges. If you live in the U.S. then you have religious freedom, a plethora of bible translations, a vast array of Christian books and periodicals, Christian music of every stripe. That's good, but these won't keep you from apostasy. Perhaps you attend a Bible preaching church, one committed to the inerrancy of Scripture. That's good, but this won't keep you from apostasy. Maybe you have Christian parents who prayed with and for you, who lived out and instructed you in Christian living. That's good too, but these won't keep you from apostasy. Maybe you have warm feelings of love for Jesus. That's good, but it will not keep you from apostasy. Maybe you had a dramatic conversion experience, which you constantly review with awe and wonder. That's good, but it will not keep you from apostasy. Perhaps you have a great deal of knowledge about the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps you have a deep knowledge of the Bible and love to teach it, receiving warm accolades from those who listen to you. That's good, but these will not keep you from apostasy. And perhaps you have been used mightily by God in the past, in the conversion and growth in grace of many. That's good, but these will not keep you from apostasy.

Apostasy is a very serious matter. It will make shipwreck of your faith, strip you of joy and power in the Holy Spirit, and if continued, will send you to hell. "Anyone who lays aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, who has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace. . .it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Hebrews 10:28-31. Why is this so serious? Because it is exactly the same thing Judas did, betraying the One who showed such mercy and grace, causing the Son to be crucified again, putting Him to open shame. Such a one cannot be renewed again to repentance, Hebrews 6:6.

Wait a second, Al. What about eternal security? What about "once saved, always saved." I know. What a wonderful doctrine and I wholly subscribe to it. But what do we do with Hebrews 10:28ff? What about the seven letters in Revelation 2, 3 where time after time Jesus says, "To Him who overcomes, I will grant Him to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God. . .He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments, and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and His angels?"

Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flows the springs of life, Proverbs 4:23. How do you do that? You must be faithful in heart work. By this I mean go straight to your heart, not your actions, not your speech, not your feelings. Consider the beatitudes. Do you realize how desperate you are for grace? You are bankrupt without Jesus. You are out of options. You have no hope. Even as a believer, if you entertain the notion that you have now arrived and can make it today without Jesus, then you are in big trouble. You are to grieve, to mourn over your sin. Let it break your heart, even the "little things." Be willing to accept rebuke from a spouse or brother or sister in Christ. That's meekness. And then realize that because you are so vile in your flesh, you must hunger and thirst for righteousness, for the living Christ, not unlike a man who has not had water for two days does. He thinks only of water.

Then cut back the root sins as far as you can. You cannot uproot them in this life, but you can cut them back to ground level, so to speak, as you do in pruning a bush. I suggest your root sins are pride (I don't have to listen to God), unbelief (I won't trust what God says), and rebellion (I know what God says, and I believe it, but I refuse to do it). These may lead to sexual sin and broken relationships through pride; to bitterness, anger, resentment, or despair through unbelief; and a failure to submit to authority and all the consequent problems through rebellion.

Finally, if you are to guard yourself against apostasy you must kiss the Son. "Do homage, kiss the Son, lest He become angry and you perish in the way," Psalm 2:12. Consider the immoral woman of Luke 7:36ff, who knelt at the feet of Jesus, kissing His dirty feet, bathing them with her hair in her tears. You may think, "How quaint!" But don't miss the point of the story. You are that immoral woman. Before a holy God, even the best, the most moral of you, were condemned to hell because of willful rebellion. But God has had

mercy. Dwell on this daily, live in this truth, and see God move your heart to profound devotion to Jesus, keeping you from apostasy.

FORGET NONE OF HIS BENEFITS is a weekly devotional by Reverend Al Baker, pastor of Christ Community Presbyterian Church in West Hartford, Connecticut.

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