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What is apostasy and how should we react to it?

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not," 2 Peter 2:1-3.

I read these words, only days ago, as I followed Robert Murray McCheyne's Bible reading calendar.

The Lord's battle against apostasy is of long standing. It is almost as old as time itself.

Many Christians tend to believe that the controversy with "apostasy" began with the emergence of the modern "Ecumenical Movement" and its campaign for church unity which metamorphosed into a movement for the unity of all religions.

In truth, the Lord's controversy with apostasy began with the devil's rebellion in heaven when he sought to establish himself as a rival, a conqueror of the Lord, overthrowing Him and replacing His rule with his own.

An allusion is made to this act of rebellion in Isaiah 14, though it refers principally to the king of Babylon and also has a prophetic application to the Antichrist. The use of the titles of Satan in this passage indicates the link between all sin and the origins of it in the devil's rebellion. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." Isaiah 14:12-15, KJV.

Thus the apostasy began.

In this little study I wish to consider first of all:

WHAT IS APOSTASY??

There is a tendency amongst separatists to misapply this term for the simple reason that we, above all, are engaged in a battle with apostasy.

While it is undoubtedly true that what rightly belongs in the camp of apostasy often goes unrecognised by ill-informed Christians, it is also true that some ill-advised Christians apply the term "apostate" to those who are not. That is a serious error which I am sure offends the Lord since it involves miscalling one of His.

So, just what is apostasy?

1. It is that which once professed allegiance to the camp of righteousness. Consider carefully these words of Peter. "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them," 2 Peter 2:15, 21.

Consider also what Jude wrote. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day," Jude 1:6.

In both these passages there is an alluding to the forsaking of the path of truth for the path of the lie. Apostasy is just that. It is a turning of the back upon the truth of God. An apostate is one who once owned the truth, professed allegiance to it but then repudiated it. It refers to the rejection of Christianity by someone who formerly professed to be a Christian. It is a most serious error. So serious that Peter says, "For it had



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been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them," 2 Peter 2:21.

2. Apostasy purports to be the true way of God. "Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage," 2 Peter 2:15-19.

There is a professing to be what they are not. What they called wisdom is in truth, 'madness'. They claim to be wells but they have no water to refresh, clouds but they contain no heavenly rain. They speak great swelling words but they are vanity - 'devoid of truth'. They promise liberty but bondage and corruption are all they can deliver.

What folly to believe, to follow, such! Yet that is what many do. Here in our own little Province, apostasy has its devoted adherents and their witness and lies have deceived many Christians. The lies and the liars that undergird and support the system of government in this land have their origins in the camp of the apostasy which is the chief source of sustenance for this wicked regime. Yet Christians in Ulster have been, and continue to be, deceived and deluded into supporting this wicked regime.

It is interesting that the Democratic Unionist Party, Sinn Fein/IRA's partner in the Stormont Power-sharing government, had a Roman Catholic priest address its recent annual conference. (Read the story [here](#))

The DUP has as its motto, "The Truth shall set you free". Was it the "TRUTH" that they were hearing from this servant of Antichristianity? And would what he said lead to freedom? I think not.

This is an example of what Peter says: "They promise them liberty". Liberty will not be the outcome of the policies of any political party or religious group, which once professed allegiance to the truth of God but has now embraced the servant of popery and ecumenism.

3. The true objective of apostasy is the destruction of the 'way of truth'. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of," 2 Peter 2:1-2.

The apostasy seeks to discredit the 'way of truth' by alluring believers away from its path and its holy standards and thus discredit and dishonour the truth of God. Thus David, when he was allured away from the paths of holiness into sin was told by the Lord why he would be severely judged. "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die," 2 Samuel 12:14. So it is still. God's "name continually every day is blasphemed" (Isaiah 52:5) because of the sins and backsliding of God's people who are ever so ready to hearken to the siren voice of the apostate.

In Numbers 25, we have the backsliding of Israel at Shittim. The source of that departure is given us in Numbers 31:15-16. "And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD." The seducers led Israel astray. That scene has been repeated amongst God's people in some form in every generation since.

The destruction of the path of holiness is the objective of the apostasy.



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4. It is skilled at presenting itself deceitfully. "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not," 2 Peter 2:3.

Years ago, whenever one who was crafty and cunning was being described, the phrase: 'he could buy and sell you' was employed. Surely such a phrase can be traced back to Peter's words! The crafty apostates, through feigned words deceive. They seek to "bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them". They disguise their verbal poison. It is by "good words and fair speeches" (Romans 16:18) they deceive the simple who believe them and follow them.

We are taught that "such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works," 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

This will be seen especially in the last days of this age when the penultimate manifestation of antichristianity will take the centre of this world's stage. "And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration," Revelation 17:1-6.

Please notice the reaction of John to this scene. "When I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." A woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus and yet John 'wondered with great admiration'!!

How deceitful and alluring, even to a believer of John's standing, the wickedness of apostasy can be made to appear by the devil!

We see that allurements working its magic on many of God's people today.

II. THOUGH AT THE FIRST, PRESENTING ITSELF IN BEAUTIFUL GARMENTS, ITS TRUE CHARACTER IS SOON REVEALED.

The corruption of apostasy cannot be concealed for long.

The tares may appear as wheat for a time but soon their true nature shows forth. Judas may pass as an apostle to the deceiving of the others in the apostolic band, but soon his love of money and the empty profession of love that he had for the Saviour must surface and expose his fraudulent character.

Whitewash can maintain its facade only for a short time before the blackness seeps through!

The apostasy will soon be seen for what it is.

1. Apostates are teachers of "damnable heresies". "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies," 2 Peter 2:1. Heresies that will damn those who believe them. That is how serious this matter is. The eternal souls of men are at stake. The sweet smiling, soft spoken, charming personalities who are ever consulted for their views and pontifications, are in truth men who are damning souls. How far removed that is from



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the persona, the image they promote!

2. Apostates are deniers of the Lord Jesus. "But there were false prophets also among the people even denying the Lord that bought them," 2 Peter 2:1. The word "deny" means to refuse Christ as this verse shows in which the word translated 'refuse' appears. "This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush," Acts 7:35.

Apostates, even though they speak of Christ and employ endearments regarding Him, are in truth, DENIERS of the Saviour. They deny the truth of the Bible concerning Christ. Found amongst their teachings are rejections of the inspiration of the Scriptures, the miracles wrought by Christ and His servants in both the Old and the New Testaments, the atoning and substitutionary death of Christ, His literal resurrection and His glorious coming again to judge sin and rule the world. These, and indeed every element of divine truth, are denied amongst the teachings of apostates.

3. Apostates seek to blaspheme the truth. "And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of," 2 Peter 2:2. The phrase "shall be evil spoken of" is translated by the one word "blaspheme or blasphemeth" in many places in the New Testament (Matthew 9:3, John 10:36, Revelation 13:6, 16:11, 21).

The hiss of the serpent is to be discerned in every one of their utterances!

4. Apostates promote lawlessness. The deeds of the people of Sodom are described by Peter as "unlawful deeds," 2 Peter 2:8. Do we not find the liberal theologians and modernists ever siding with such deeds and sanctioning them and seeking the promotion of their acceptance amongst society and the penalising of those who reject such behaviour as perverted and wicked?? Yes, we do. Peter called such activity as being 'outside or a violation of the law'.

There are very few denominations today which reject sodomy for what it is but rather at least tolerate it amongst their ranks. Some, of course, go further and embrace such perversion as acceptable behaviour for one they willingly ordain as a 'minister of the gospel'!!

5. Apostates walk after the fallen, depraved, carnal nature of man. "But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities," 2 Peter 2:10.

"But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption," 2 Peter 2:12.

"And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children," 2 Peter 2:13-14.

"These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error," 2 Peter 2:17-18.

The central motivation, the stimulus, the incentive of the thinking and actions of apostates is the energy of man's fallen nature. Being unregenerate and without the knowledge of the true God, they ever live and move in the realm of the corrupt nature of fallen man.

How evil the heart of man is!

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that



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seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways: and the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" Romans 3:10-18, 23. Unless a man is 'born again', regenerated, made 'a new creature in Christ', he is under the dominion of sin and the works of sin he will do. He can do none other.

This is the explanation for the ongoing corruption within the apostate churches but chiefly in the Church of Rome, despite the many exposures and so called reforms introduced to stop such wickedness. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil," Jeremiah 13:23.

6. Apostates have a truly evil nature. "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire," 2 Peter 2:22. Accustomed as I am to denouncing apostasy in the strongest terms I can muster, were it not for these words of divine inspiration, I do believe that I would not dare to employ such terminology to describe apostasy and apostates.

What vile appetites are here depicted! What a delighting in the unclean is here represented. This is where apostasy would have the nations of men feast and lie down.

How different are the ways of God!

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever," Psalms 23:1-6.

The choice for Ulster is between David's Shepherd and the sham of apostasy.

III THE END RESERVED FOR APOSTASY IS MOST TERRIFYING.

Many deny the terror of the Lord's judgment today and are bold enough to mock and scoff at such an idea, holding in utter contempt those who believe God's Word on this solemn matter.

Of course, that is but another lie of the apostasy.

The day of God's wrath against apostasy and sin is set and draws on.

1. The day of judgment has been long appointed. This underscores the nature of God and His hatred of sin. He will react against sin in only one way - JUDGMENT. That is the immediate and instinctive reaction of a Holy God to a breach of His law. In mercy, He may delay the judgment and show great long-suffering but judgment is instantly decreed upon the commission of sin. Men commonly make a great mistake in this matter. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," Ecclesiastes 8:11. Judgment delayed is seen by foolish men who reject what God says on the matter, as judgment never happening!

Reader, do not make this mistake. Every one of the sins which you have committed and which rightly deserve the eternal judgment of God, will be visited by fiery indignation, irrespective of how long He may have delayed that visitation.

God's judgment is termed "swift" in verse 1. "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the



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Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." It carries the meaning of judgment that shortly will fall. These words were written some 2000 years ago. That to man is a very, very long time. But, my friend, in the light of eternity it is but the blink of an eye!!

As creatures of time, we cannot conceive of eternity but we are able to recognise to some degree that however long time may be, it is as nothing compared to eternity. Our short spell on earth will soon be over and if we die in our sins it will mean the encountering of this "swift destruction" spoken of by Peter. A man, who apparently was a well known Hollywood actor, went out into eternity on Saturday in America. His judgment came swiftly. He had risen that morning with no thought of death and judgment I am sure but before the sun set, he was in God's eternity.

Life at best is very brief,
Like the falling of a leaf,
Like the binding of a sheaf,
Be in time.

2. The have been occasions when the wrath of God reserved against sin has manifested itself. It is as if the cup of judgment has briefly overflowed and revealed something of its contents to an unbelieving world.

Some of these instances are recorded by Peter in this chapter. In verse 4, the judgment of God against the rebellious angels is mentioned. In verse 5, the judgment which fell in Noah's day is recorded. And in verse 6 there begins a reference to God's wrath which fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. While man can not look upon the evidence which supports the judgment of angels, he can see evidence of the flood in Noah's day and also the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah.

Of course, in keeping with man's rebellious nature and his defiance of all God says and does, man has set himself to deny the evidence seen in the area of the Dead Sea and the many sites which manifest tangible evidence of a universal flood.

Once again, that which was meant to aid the sinner to repent of his sins and learn the dangers arrayed against his soul is rejected, denied and cast aside.

Past manifestations of God's judgment clearly testify of a coming day of universal judgment. "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead," Acts 17:31.

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished," 2 Peter 2:9.

Unseen by men that awful engagement is, nevertheless, marked ineradicably in God's appointment book.

3. As awful as the judgments referred to by Peter may have been, they fall immeasurably short of the fullness of God's wrath which has yet to be visited upon wicked men. There is a furnace being heated, a cup of wrath being filled which has been approaching its fulness for a long, long time. "Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him," Nahum 1:6.

God will act against man's sin in righteousness. Man will get what he has long deserved. It will be the day of recompense from the Lord. "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompense," Isaiah 59:18. There will be none to complain or open their mouth against the justice of God in that day. Man will acquiesce in the justice of the punishment he suffers.



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Above all, the punishment will be eternal. "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever," 2 Peter 2:17. That is how long God's wrath will endure - FOR EVER.

It is little wonder that we are told that in such a place there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth"! Matthew 8:12.

In closing, please consider these points of application.

1. In the light of these words of Peter, how vital it is that we treat apostasy as the dreadful wickedness that it is. All too many believers treat apostasy and the widespread departure from God's truth, taking place all around us today, in a most casual manner.

When leprosy was confirmed in the body of an Israelite, then that person was to be put out of the camp and separated from every member of the nation. He was to be avoided on pain of being contaminated and being treated then as he was. This was to happen, irrespective of the virtues of the individual or what winning traits there were to be seen in their character. Whatever their former service or spiritual gifts they must be excluded and shunned. So says God's Word.

So it must be with regards fellowship with those who embrace apostasy. But it must also be the case with those who refuse to heed God's counsel and who refuse to treat apostasy and those within its ranks who may indeed be saved, as God requires.

Such compromisers must be separated from and no fellowship is to be entered upon with them.

Today, all too many preachers are only too willing to ignore the sins of a man with links to those within the ranks of the apostasy, because of his academic standing or his gifts or his abilities as a preacher. They are blind to the leprosy of his disobedience, caught as a result of his fraternisation with apostasy. If they do this they will be infected with the leprosy of modern theology and that through the one they admired. They most certainly will contract this evil malady passed on by his disobedience of God's Word and their disobedient contact with him..

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," Ephesians 5:11.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed," 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7, 14.

2. It is a mark of the inroads of the influence of apostasy whenever God's people begin to leave off heeding such calls for separation and begin to wander into the camp of the apostasy and welcome fellowship with those God condemns. The conflict of opinions which may arise amongst Christians regarding the apostasy and how it is to be treated is seen in Numbers 25.

"And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baalpeor. And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust



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both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel," Numbers 25:1-8.

Here are two views on fellowship with those God says must be utterly avoided. There were those felt such fellowship was quite in order and profitable. There were those who took the very opposite view. One mingled, cavorted, fraternised. The other sought to put to death the offenders. I need go no further with the matter, for the Lord clearly vindicates Phinehas.

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel," Numbers 25:10-13.

Let Phinehas be our model, our standard in these days.

3. Those Christians who mingle with apostates or those who fellowship with them endanger themselves and their families. Remember the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

"And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also," Numbers 16:25-34.

The only means of safety in that day of defiance was to "Depart from the tents of these wicked men." That warning took on a special meaning for the people Israel when they saw the judgment of God against these evil men. "And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also."

What is needed today is an awareness of the wrath of God against apostasy. That will spur God's people to a right attitude toward the lawlessness of ism and keep us from the company of the wicked and those who would compromise with them.

May the Lord awaken His servants to preach on this issue and stir the hearts of His people to obey such preaching.

"For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," Ephesians 5:5-11.

Ivan Foster.



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