

A man in danger of apostasy

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Now shall we turn to God's word this evening. Just a verse in a line in Psalm 14 at the beginning.

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. Now that's a fool. In the Bible, a fool is a person who morally is depraved.

That's basically the Bible meaning of a fool. Then when we turn to Hebrews chapter 3, we find a word from God to professing Christians, Hebrew Christians here.

And in verse 12, the apostle says, Take heed, brethren, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

[1 : 42] In other words, the Christian professor is warned against, warned against quite severely, that somehow he or she might become like the fool.

And the apostle says, exhort yourselves one another every day.

In other words, there's a frightening possibility. Now what am I going to try to speak on this evening?

This morning, I tried to show you in Jeremiah, that Jeremiah in chapter 15, who had been for the first 14 chapters a mouth speak of God.

He had preached the truth that God gave him. There was lots of opposition. And then we found in chapter 15, he went down.

[3 : 08] And in a moment in his experience, he almost went in to unbelief. And we saw this morning how that this can happen.

How the greatest among God's children can be tempted into unbelief.

We found this morning that when a person goes into a state of unbelief, there's only one thing that God asks for. It's repentance.

And turning away from it. Jeremiah had to do that. Jeremiah had to do that. He was told by God that if he didn't repent, he would loathe his prophetic office.

It was as serious as that. Now that we went to that this morning. How a child of God can somehow go into the mist.

[4 : 08] I called it a mist. I called it a mist this morning. And I want to use that this evening also. I want to suggest that unbelief, in some ways, is like a mist.

That sometimes a person can go into and then get out. A person can get into it and get out.

But there are some folk who enter into this mist who never get out. And they're professing Christians. That's the solemn thing. And it's against this that the apostle is warning into the Hebrew Christians.

So I want to look with you tonight at the danger of apostasy. It's not just going into the mist.

It's staying in the mist. That's what I want you to look at. You see, in the first part in the psalm, the fool says there's no God.

[5 : 24] His heart says there's no God. In other words, he tries to convince himself that there is no God. And then he patterns his life according to his own thinking.

And so he then says there is no God. Now then, there's no doubt. Jeremiah tells it also that the heart of a human being is desperately wicked.

Who can know it? It's above deceit. It's deceitful above all things than anything else on this earth.

So if you're here tonight and you're an unchristian, you're not a Christian, you've got something within your heart that's more deceitful than anything else in this world.

You've got it in yourself. That's what Jeremiah says. Now we find this. That when a person becomes a Christian, that heart or principle is overwhelmed by the grace of God. It's not taken out altogether. There is what the word of God calls the flesh in every believer. Romans 7 will find that quite clear.

[7 : 03] There is a flesh part of us. The flesh is in every believer. And in that flesh of every believer, there is the very seeds of unbelief there in the believer as it is in the unbeliever.

The seeds are in the flesh. And so the flesh can attempt again and again to go back to the unbelief that was there before they were converted.

You might say that's surely not. Yes, it's quite true in the scriptures. Now then, when you go into a congregation like this, there is usually at least four kinds of people.

Four kinds of people. Which one of you may be tonight? First of all, the Bible tells us there is an unbeliever. And that person exists in unbelief.

He thinks or she thinks in unbelief, walks in unbelief, and lives in unbelief. If one did believe, they would believe not only God, but what God says.

[8 : 34] And they would live their life according to what God demands. The proof that we believe God in reality is that we obey Him and trust Him.

So there's someone in here and you're an unbeliever. You exist in unbelief. You have not believed that God Himself, God Himself came down to this earth in the person of His Son.

and God Himself was crucified in the person of His Son so that He might redeem unbelievers.

That's a miracle. A miracle from God. And it's a miracle that will make you believe it. So there's a believing, there's an unbelieving person in the congregation this evening.

And then in every congregation, you see it in the Bible, you have a professing Christian. Professing Christian. And a professing Christian can be overcome by unbelief.

[9 : 50] Our text tells us be careful lest you go into unbelief. And then again, there is in the Bible, there is a third type of person.

A backslider. Now a backslider is a person that drifts into unbelief and remains in it.

And then ultimately, maybe at a later time, comes back. That's a backslider. But there's another person. Maybe here, who knows.

There's a person who is a professing Christian and who have not, has not really been born of the Spirit.

They've had a certain kind of spiritual experience and they then go into the midst of unbelief and they stay there and ultimately they go out into hell itself.

[11 : 04] There's no doubt, as I said this morning, there is a believer here who can be tempted to unbelief. Now there's one thing to be tempted into unbelief and go into the midst.

Christ. It can happen in most people's lives. When you looked at Jeremiah, I thought, when I went home this afternoon, it was very interesting.

One thing about Jeremiah, he wasn't even a backslider in one sense. Because the backslider, as I'll be able to see, like the apostate, it goes away not only from God, but from his word.

Now Jeremiah never went away from his word. He fought over his word. He was tempted over the word. He doubted even God himself, but he never went against the word of God.

But a backslider will do that and always apostate. Now let me say this. An unbeliever dies in unbelief.

[12 : 18] And they are lost for all eternity. The worm dies and fire the symbol of destruction is what Jesus said.

The unbeliever dies in unbelief and until the unbeliever dies, he never becomes a believer until after he dies.

But he's lost. Then the professing Christian, they can be overcome and they can become apostate through unbelief.

A professing Christian is warned against here in Hebrews. the backsliders. The backslider, can be tempted to unbelief and he can go away from God.

But he will come back. And the exercised Christian can be tempted to go away.

[13 : 29] But what I can't find in the scriptures, it never tells me the difference between an apostate that goes away and doesn't come back and the backslider that does come back.

I never know the difference in the Bible between a backslider and an apostate until he goes back. And if he doesn't go back, the evidence would seem to be that that person would be an apostate.

Now then, I would say that an apostate is declared in God's word as a person who ultimately is overcome by unbelief.

Now there are five passages in scriptures with regard to that. And that's not just really what I'm trying to finish off with this evening. I'm just trying to enter into it with this.

Now I want you to listen to what God's word says, word of warning, that's through and through the whole scriptures. If you're a child of God, and if by chance your standards are coming down, if your response to the word of God is less than it used to be, if you've come into a place where you're satisfied just going to church once or twice on Sunday, and have no bother about God too much over the week, and you'll spend the whole time in your own ways, in your own thoughts, therefore, you're very often at the very door of the mists of atheism, as I would call it.

[15:21] Now, in 1st Timothy, chapter 1 and 9, let me read this. He speaks of those who he writes to holding on to the faith, and hold on to the faith, says the apostle, and a good conscience, and then he says, some have rejected these, and they've made shipwreck of their faith.

Two things, two things, holding on to the faith, and two, a good conscience.

These two things go together, faith, and a good conscience, a conscience that is clean, with regard to personal sin, that sin has either been cleansed, and revoked.

And if you and I find that our faith is dimming, and our sin is increasing, then we're almost going on to the ship of shipwreck.

You see, two things go together, faith in God, and a good conscience. You can't have faith in God and not be clean, not be right, not have peace.

[17:03] And these two things are followed by two things normally. Faith is followed with unbelief, faith. And a good conscience is followed by disobedience.

And so you get professing Christians who have lost their faith. God is not central, and their conscience are seared.

They don't worry over the sins they once worried over. They don't put away the sins they once put away. that's the beginning of the danger to go into the mists of atheism.

1 Timothy 4 and 1 it says this, some shall depart, that's how it says, abandon is the word, they will abandon or depart from the faith following deceiving spirits, following different spirits, deceiving spirits, alternative to the truth of God in the scriptures.

And ultimately that person doesn't know the difference between his own mind voice and the deceiving spirits.

[18:38] In other words, Satan can come into a person mind and you think it's your own mind and you can be so united with the Satan mind that your mind and Satan's mind are exactly the same.

You're pretty near to go farther into the mists of atheism when you start believing in your own mind what Satan tells you with lies.

He says, some people will abandon the faith, abandon belief, abandon it. I want you to notice that. The danger is there. In 2 Timothy 4 and 4 it says, for this time will come and they will not endure sound doctrine.

This is the next stage. They don't want to endure sound doctrine. They want the standards to come down. They want their lives to be less involved with God.

[19:59] The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. They will turn away their ears to the truth. You have the conscience.

You have the word of God coming to you and telling you that there's something wrong, that your life is not right before God. That is quite simply here the truth presented to you by the spirit.

Then there comes the next step where you turn away your ears from the truth that you once knew so that you're no longer the person you used to be.

Is that not true? Be clear. It happens. It's a deliberate act. It's a turning away from the truth. that's the danger of apostasy.

If you can live and I can live in sin that we couldn't live in many years ago then we're in danger. Hebrews 3 and 12 Lest lest lest there be any among you having a heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

[21:28] Now he's coming a bit farther. He's now departing from God. Do you see the stage? first of all you give up your faith and your conscience it's followed by unbelief and disobedience then all of a sudden you you abandon the faith you you listen to deceiving spirits which tell you it's too hard don't don't don't be stupid live your life as it should be lived and these voices that you listen to and

then after that then you can't stand sound doctrine like you once could once you love you can't stand it anymore and you turn away from the truth now the first thing along that road there is there's an evil heart within you departing from the living god is departing from god himself and then second peter 3 and 17 it says this beware you also being led away with the error of the wicked fall from your steadfastness the danger is clear now what i've done here at the very beginning is i think to show you the danger that we all face if you're an unbeliever then you're lost you're unsaved the bible says you will be lost forever there's no doubt in that if you're here this evening and you're unconverted and you've not come to jesus you haven't come to the cross and said to jesus be my savior wash me in your blood if you haven't done that you're not converted no matter what church you go to or anything else if you've not had an encounter with god in jesus at the cross but for those that have no professing to have that there is this tremendous danger of going in to apostasy i want to do first of all is to examine this danger i call it atheism atheism a mist and i want to use that picture as a mist because i was thinking of that town in russia where the atomic thing fell chukernoo what's the name of the place that's right you know that's the place well what happened the the radio thing came down and has come down and has come down on the people there is a a spiritual a spiritual a radio a radio coming from from from hell that comes on certain people when they go into the mist of uh of atheism and they destroy it destroys them it's a frightening thing and so i want to look at i want you to look at that you see there are two ways out of the mist it's either back to the cross and to god or it's a door that goes right to hell itself and both roads will take you to belief isn't that strange in hell he lifted his eyes and he knew now then i want you to look with you this this evening just briefly at the temptation that we're warned against

in the scriptures temptation to atheism how do you get that way how does a person get that way because we we can get that way quite easily and i want to do with you five things you'd think the sermon's not going until next tomorrow but it's not really i want you to look first off at the paths that leads to atheism the paths i want you then to look at the pattern of atheism the possibility of it the poverty of it and finally the putting away of it now that's a those that preach you know that there's a lot of sermons in that there but that's not what i want to do i want to just leave it briefly with you you see why i'm wanting to preach this is that it's an ongoing danger that's real to us all it's an ongoing danger you see the temptation to going into atheism or unbelief call them both the same is possible it's a temptation that's real and it's a temptation that's frightening and we would look at that this danger now why do we sometimes get into the place of atheism and belief when we want to toss the whole thing off to get rid of christianity it's burning me down lets me get rid of it have you ever felt like that well let me say first of all one of the reasons is that inside you you have the natural flesh already you've got to help before you start it's not always things that are outside that causes it it's outside joined to what you are yourself there is sufficient evil in your own nature and in my nature to follow this road or return to it even rabbi duncan after he was converted he went into a state of unbelief that took a time for a free church man they were much more solemn in those days and if you can see a real minister of the free church in a very very solemn place to see a free church minister dancing in the D dancing in the bridge well he had believed in God again the natural flesh will be against the spirit and will try to push us that way anyway then another way that takes us to atheism is inconsistency in the church or in the fellowship you belong to perhaps you're disappointed with your fellowship you expected better and you find people in the church that that have hurt you people that you expected better from you remember when you were converted it was so bright and everyone was so nice and all of a sudden you begin to see the flaws you flee you see the the difficulties in people's nature you see the flaws and the nastiness that's in a person's nature certain people in the fellowship almost seems to deny their profession blatant and Christ-likeness in the fellowship that you belong to it might be in the office bearers it might be among people that you've got to know and so you've come to the place and you say you know there's nothing Christianity in the jolly place and at the time you're down and you're almost saying is there a God is there a God if that's God and that's what God has produced then I want nothing to do with it and you don't see a poor believer that's struggling against their sin because it's a different sin that may be that you have in this experience yourself but inconsistency in the fellowship it drives people away to atheism and if you're a Christian and in a fellowship remember this that your conduct can direct other people almost to hell itself if you're a Christian you can be the cause of a person almost going to hell itself if your testimony is not according to what God calls you to be and me also and so there's the natural flesh that we've got and there's inconsistency in the fellowship so

that you look around and you'll say well I'm

I'm no better I'm no worse and you might be here you're unconverted tonight and you say look at that Christian look at that one look at that one if that's Christianity I'm not going to get converted tonight my friends not only you can do that which prevents you from going to Christ but it can also make other people away go away from Christ and you're both wrong don't make excuses for your iniquity alright that's the second one now there's a thinking person here another reason for people going into this mist of unbelief and atheism is answered prayer or else the answers that you expected that you didn't get the answers the answers that you expected for prayer that you didn't expect promises that you found in the scripture that don't seem to be fulfilled at least not in the way that you expected it

I asked God for something but he didn't give it to me he did not fulfill his promise I didn't get the power that I was wanting that I expected to help me over sin I didn't get the power to be a better person that I wanted to be because you only use look at one part of the picture then you you come to God and you accuse him and you go into atheism what God wanted to do before you got power is to learn the principles he wanted you to break your natural heart he wanted to break your proud nature he wanted to make you weak so that he could make you strong but the time in between you didn't want to wait the things he wanted to teach you first you didn't want to learn you wanted to be like God that's true it happens to many of us we all know it unanswered prayer

[33 : 26] God is not true and then that word that's that deceiving spirits that we talk about will come in in our own voice when we meet with human tragedy when we look at the vastness of the lost are they all going to be in hell and the voice comes surely not not that God and then you go to the television and you see famine and all those babies till you have to turn it off and the voice comes where's God and then you see poverty you see people down eating eating hay on the grass and you wonder where's God what's there's there's reality there and then there's ignorance humanistic philosophy it enters into us as I said early on there's a verse of scripture that we must read above our beds shall not the judge of all the earth do right if we don't know the answers we do know about

Calvary we do know what Christ did on earth we don't know the extent of sin and iniquity what it's done and we don't know all what God is doing or will do but human tragedy takes people away to atheism and then feeling empty in the fellowship and in Christian fellowship you come to a stage in Christian fellowship where it's not what it was and it's not what I expected and it's not what the Bible promises there's nothing in it and you start not going to the permitting and then you start going twice a day and then you start once a day and then you start once a fortnight yes with those that look at human tragedy are we more moral than

God if we think we are that's atheism and then finally there's personal failure failure as a Christian you feel yourself in spite of God's promises failing in Christian living failing in your home at your work personal failure will direct people to atheism and finally the reproach of the cross I'm tired of it I don't want it I don't want anymore to accept it now these are the paths that can lead one to the mists of atheism or unbelief and cause them to grope in the darkness this is how it happens in your mind am I mistaken in my faith was that just a stage that I went through is there really a God am I imagining everything this is the mist the mist my friends that's the very often the paths that take you to atheism and unbelief the pattern the pattern of atheism is this that your life changes yes your life changes you don't even know how lovely you might have been when you were a young Christian or you were innocent there was a warmth in your face and a spark in your eye and you would do anything for God and you would do anything for anyone you had a developing character that was helpful that people you could go to you weren't afraid for anything now then

I want to say that the pattern of atheism is that it changes your life you have all of a sudden a character change a character change let me look at you I saw you there so bright and so warm I see you now in the midst of unbelief there's a harshness developing on your face a harshness and it gets more harsh and it doesn't come off like it used to there's a harshness develops there's antagonism develops there's something in you that's nippy there's a stubbornness developing that you're so stubborn that you're not going to listen to anyone or anything because he's as big a sinner as me that's the truth there's a stubbornness develops in your character there's a blindness develops so that you can't even see what you've become there's a bitterness developing there's a spiritual distractiveness developing there's a change developing not

[40 : 15] Jeremiah David almost went into it in Psalm 73 he says how does God know and then he says afterwards he says does God know and then he says does God care and then he says is there

a God that's atheism now I want you to look at your life the danger of apostatism the harshness develops the antagonist develops the stubbornness develops the blindness develops the bitterness develops the spiritual destructive and you're no use and the change develops that's what you have become from where you once were isn't that not frightening that's the pattern of atheism you say not me oh yes my friends there's what we call the possibility of atheism or unbelief do you know the difference between atheism and unbelief the one is very seeming softer like for instance we used to call a man who was loading drunk coming every night they called him a drunkard do you know what they call him now they've got an alcohol problem right and belief and atheism they're twins a person that is filthy with young children they're not called by what they should be

I forget the name just now do you know the name is paladine there's a name like that there's a name for it but it's a different thing I don't want to go on homosexual used to be called a sodomite and so we move away so unbelief and atheism it's a gentle word it's a gentle word and I say there's a possibility of it once of course the believer would say it's impossible me to be like that oh no way once it seemed impossible once it seemed preposterous to think of when it seemed frightening in the past but watch the roads that lead to it you can come into it through the road of death of deadness once you get dead spiritually you can come into it through doubt that's kept you can come into it through disobedience against God's word you can come into it through disappointment and you can come into it through deterioration in yourself you get into the mists and you're harsh and you're antagonistic and you're stubborn and you're blind and you're bitter and you're spiritually destructive and you've changed and you sit at the

Lord's table solemnly the possibility of it is there because it's right written in these scriptures that I gave you I look at somebody that goes that way and I see what I call the poverty that you never really thought before the poverty of atheism or unbelief what's the poverty of unbelief that you find in the mist first of all you have a life that has no meaning no meaning you once had a meaning you might have problems but there was a meaning there were at least a day when the burdens were going to go over and you were going into the city of God you had meaning but you don't have any meaning now there's no meaning in life it's a life that leaves areas of doubt because when you're in the mist and you're like the fool that says there is no

God what if there is a God so there's doubt in unbelief and then it's a life that seems to be devoid of the help of God there's no one you can go to because you've thrown him out and it's a life usually morally deteriorated morally deteriorated your personal life gets morally defiled your family life deteriorates your social life deteriorates and your work life is the same the old motivation is gone and yet behind it all there is still knowledge that you're not sure of oh how poverty those that go along to the midst of atheism you see to me know is one you

I go to the end as you