

The Amazing, Alarming, and Awful Apostasy

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Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God, the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained [written of beforehand] to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 1-4)

We are seeing in our day an amazing, an alarming, and an awful apostasy of the church. There has always been a question among students of prophecy about just how far the organized church would go into the apostasy before the Rapture occurs. That is, at what particular point in the apostasy would the true church, made up of those who were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, be taken out of the world?

Now some of us did not believe that we would see the organized churches plunge this far into a departure from the faith before the true church — that is, the body of believers who actually trust in Christ as Savior, recognizing they are sinners and their only hope is in Him — would be taken out of the world. When Dr. William Culbertson was here in Los Angeles speaking at the Prophetic Conference, he said to some of us privately, “The things I am seeing today I thought would not take place until the Tribulation!” And I’m sure that this is the viewpoint of many students of prophecy today.

In this sense, therefore, it’s an amazing apostasy that has come upon us. Suddenly the church has departed from the faith, and many of us thought that by the time this happened the true church would be gone.

In view of some of the activities of the contemporary church it’s an alarming apostasy. Because of the present conditions in the church (and in this message I will merely touch the fringe of them), it is an awful apostasy. For this reason I think we can accurately say that we are right now in an amazing and alarming and awful apostasy in the church.

Now when I say apostasy, I mean it in the Bible sense, a departure from the faith. The word in the original Greek is *aphistemi*. *Histemi* means “to stand” and *apo* means “away from.” Let me illustrate it this way: It’s my custom to stand at the pulpit to preach, but if I stood over by the piano, it would be *aphistemi*, standing away from the pulpit. And today there is an *aphistemi* in the church, which means that men who at one time professed to believe the great basic truths of the Christian faith have now denied those things. They have departed from them.

For that reason it might be well to take a second look at what the Scripture states about the apostasy in relationship to the Rapture of the true believers. In light of where we are at the present time we need to see what the Word of God actually says in this connection.

The question arises: Will these organized churches go into total apostasy? Will there be a total eclipse of the faith? The Lord Jesus made a statement in Luke 18:8 that has been difficult for many to accept, and I must confess that it was very difficult for me to accept years ago. He asked: “...When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” That is, will He find the body of truth that He left here some *two thousand* years ago? Will He find *the* faith upon the earth? This question is so couched in the Greek (we can’t do this in English) that it demands a negative answer. So the answer to it is no, He will not find *the* faith upon the earth when He

returns. And so we draw from this that there will be a total apostasy of the organized church. We have this confirmed, I think, in the seven churches of Asia Minor (see Revelation 2 and 3). You find that the church in Ephesus represents the apostolic church, the church at its best. And it's true that after the apostolic era the church grew numerically, and it spread over the earth. But never has the church been as strong spiritually as it was back then. Today it's like that little mustard seed that got hold of the Vigoro — my, it just blossomed up and outdid itself. That little mustard seed should have been a plant, but it became a tree. And that is exactly what has happened to the church, which has gone in for numbers and buildings and programs and those things that you see from the outside. But I think it can be said of the church today what the Lord Jesus said of the Pharisees: "Outside you're a beautiful sepulchre, all white marble. But inside — dead men's bones" (see Matthew 23:27). That's an awful, frightful picture He gave of religion in His day, and He said that those conditions would prevail at the end of the age.

Now the church of Laodicea is the seventh and the last of the churches mentioned in Revelation. It represents that last period, the last death struggle of the church. The question is asked again: Why is not the Rapture mentioned at the end of the Laodicean period? And I must confess that I've had the post-tribulationists and the amillennialists taunt me with that question. It has been difficult to answer them. What exactly do we mean by insisting upon a Rapture at the end of the Laodicean period? The fact of the matter is, it doesn't take place, apparently, at the end of the Laodicean period. John was caught up to heaven at the beginning of chapter 4, and chapter 3 ended the Laodicean period. We always think of John as being representative of the church. But when he gets caught up to heaven he finds the twenty-four elders, who actually represent the church, and it's already there! So at some time during the Laodicean period the true church leaves the earth, and the organized church goes right on into the Great Tribulation as an organization that supposedly represents God—yet it denies Christ. We are moving very close to that today, by the way.

To the church of Laodicea the Lord Jesus Christ gives a word of warning, and He gives a word of wooing. He says in Revelation 3:17, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." In other words, "You say you're rich—you have many buildings, you have a tremendous program, but you 'knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked' (Revelation 3:17)." Did you know that the church in this country—and that includes the Roman Catholic and all the others—as far as the buildings and physical wealth are concerned, is the wealthiest organization in America? The church today, if it would pool all of its assets, could buy Standard Oil Company and the Rockefeller holdings to boot. It is wealthy, but powerless in this hour in which we live.

Back in the early days of the church, the pope was counting his money when one of the real saints of that period walked in on him. When he saw that he had intruded he turned to leave, but the pope said to him: "No longer can the church say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" And this saint as he was walking out said, "That's true, sir, but no longer can the church say to the impotent man, 'Rise and walk.'"

You and I are in the presence of a mad world, and the church at this hour seems to have no spiritual message for the mad world that we live in. Therefore we find that at the end of the Laodicean period Christ is absolutely outside of the organized church. When He says in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock," it's an invitation coming from the outside, a personal invitation, the same kind of invitation He gave when He was rejected by His own people as the King. It was right after He pronounced His judgment upon Chorazin and

Bethsaida and Capernaum that He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And here in Revelation He gives a personal invitation, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). This, my friend, is His response to the total apostasy of the organized church.

Now how did this apostasy come about? What has happened that has brought the organized church into what is not yet a total apostasy, but is moving in that direction fast? Well, the Epistle of Jude is the epistle on the apostasy. It has also been called the introduction to Revelation, and it certainly is that.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3)

There is a tradition that Jude actually started to write on some other great theme. For instance, he might have been planning to write on salvation as Paul did in Romans, or he might have written on the church as the body of Christ as Paul did in Ephesians. Or he might have written on this matter of fellowship, as John did in his first epistle. But whatever the subject was that he intended to write on, the Spirit of God had him push that aside. Knowing that the faith was going to be in jeopardy, He wanted him to write on that theme.

For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4)

Now I would like to bring to your attention a translation of the Bible that is practically unknown, because it was done by an Englishman who made his own translation. But he has what is probably the best translation of verse 4:

For certain men have wormed their way into the church. Long before this they were designated for judgment, impious they are who twist the grace of God into a justification of blatant immorality and who deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ.

According to this verse, the ungodly men who would come into the church would do two things: They would bring about in the church a departure, an apostasy, in two directions — blatant immorality and a denial of Christ.

First, there will be blatant immorality, and they will espouse it and support it. They will be licentious, loose, dissolute. And may I say to you that earlier in my life this passage of Scripture seemed so far removed from the church as I knew it that — I’ll be very honest with you — what James wrote here made no impression on me at all. My response then was: “You mean that people who would come into the church would actually espouse immorality? It can’t be! The church stands as a bulwark against that sort of thing.”

The second departure of these ungodly men is to deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. This denial of Him and the teaching of immorality are the two departures the church will take.

Now not only Jude speaks of this, but Paul wrote to Timothy,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but...they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3, 4)

And Peter wrote,

...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)

Blatant Immorality

Now I'm going to confine myself to a very limited number but very specific incidents that illustrate the first of these two departures from the faith. The first example that I want to give is of a church here in Southern California many years ago. I have the bulletin of this church, and the heading of this item is: "Is Your Mind All Made Up?", which we might translate into: "Are You One of These Narrow-minded, Bigoted Fundamentalists?" That's the sense of it, you understand. But you can be sure that the assistant pastor who wrote it is broad-minded!

As I write this article, I'm preparing to leave for a four-day national planning conference for homophiles (homosexuals) in San Francisco. This will be the second such meeting for this particular group, and the discussion will include such items as *Who Can Represent the Homosexuals in this Country? What Should Be the Attitude of Homosexuals Toward Heterosexuals?* and *What Can Be Done to Ease the Persecution of the Homosexual?* I will be attending the conference in my capacity as chairman of the Southern California Council of Religion and the Homophile, which is composed of ministers and homosexuals who meet in order to establish communication between the church and homosexuals. Now I realize that some persons are extremely offended at the thought of ministers even talking to homosexuals and the purpose of my writing this article is to state that many of the homosexuals I have met are persons with high moral standards. Also, I am quite sure that we have much to learn about homosexuality. We do not have an adequate definition of who the homosexual is, and we certainly have much to learn about why some persons are homosexual. If you have your mind all made up on this subject, relax a little, discuss your position with somebody with a different point of view and maybe you'll change.

Well, before I was saved I discussed things like this quite thoroughly in places where I would not want to go today. And I wonder where some of these pastors have been all their lives. This was in a church bulletin! Are you worried about what homosexuals think about heterosexuals? Apparently some people are. Now what kind of communication does this planning conference want to establish with homosexuals? Are they going to give the gospel to them? That's not in the cards at all, I can assure you. Notice that there is no reference to the fact that God condemns homosexuality in no uncertain terms. And as for the statement he makes about some homosexuals having high moral standards, this is the "playboy magazine" approach to morality

we are seeing in our day, where sin is being made to appear sophisticated. And boy, are you a square if you can't go along with it! Some preachers feel like they have to go along with it. But I'm not going along with this crowd, I can assure you of that. Oh, my friend, God loves the homosexual as much as He loves anyone else, and He gave His Son to pay the penalty for his sin. Who is going to tell him this good news if the church doesn't tell him?

But who would ever have dreamed that this once-great church would ever get so far away from their original purpose. I never dreamed I would live to see the day.

Now the other example I want to give comes from Portland, Oregon. While I was up there some time ago their newspaper, *The Oregonian*, came out with an article about a woman police captain who worked with runaways. In this interview she said that the greatest opposition she had was coming from the church. The church has established there, as some have here, a place for these young people to meet. This police captain, testifying on proposed amendments to the 11:00 P.M. curfew law for city parks, cited the case of a 15-year-old girl from another state who was hidden from the police by church workers. She said this incident was typical and that the police were foiled in their efforts to find the child. According to this police captain, the girl was sequestered by these churchmen, and when found was high on drugs and had been bused to a center for birth control pills and then spent the night partly unclothed with four older males—in a church center! The ministers of this church were called in by their church federation, and do you want to hear their answer for all this? It was: "There must have been a breakdown of communication somewhere."

My friend, may I say to you, it is happening exactly as the Bible says, that men would come in—slip in, worm their way in—ungodly men who would turn the grace of God into blatant immorality. That is happening. I never dreamed that I would see in my day the church combining what years ago was only found in the corner poolroom, the corner saloon, the gambling den, and the red-light district! They have it all now under one roof, a hangout for hoodlums. And the condition of the church in Los Angeles and certain of its centers is even worse than what I've related to you. In fact, some time ago a wiseacre here in Los Angeles wrote:

The Joneses in our town used to lie, cheat, drink, play cards, gamble and dance. They had no standing with the better people of the community. Then we had visitation evangelism, and they lined up the Joneses in the biggest church in town and they joined. (They weren't converted, but they joined.) Now the Joneses lie, cheat, drink, play cards, gamble and dance, but they're widely respected because they are members of the leading church in town.

What an awful picture this is!

Now there are a multitude of instances like this that I could relate, but these examples are sufficient to show that the apostasy is not new and is being fulfilled exactly as Jude predicted.

Denial of Christ

Now I would like to pass on to the second part of this prophecy, about those who deny our only Master and Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this direction of doctrine that there has been the most grievous departure from the faith. There has been the repudiation of the whole spectrum of

Scripture. And I think that I have the evidence to back up this statement. This quotation was written at the turn of the century:

Towards the end of the last century, unconverted and evil men crept in unawares to the professional ministry of the Gospel. They began to criticize instead of expounding the Bible, to deny its blessed truths instead of proclaiming them. Men who were paid to preach the Gospel and, in some cases, had sworn to do so, have been occupied in an ignoble effort to black out its searching light and deny the great fundamentals of Christianity. It is no longer, “thus saith the Lord,” but “thus saith the scholars, scientists or critics” who sit in judgment, not only upon the Word of God, but upon God Himself, daring to tell us what is and what is not worthy of God, thus measuring Him by the plummet of their own darkened mind.

As I said, that was written at the turn of the century. And I’d like to begin to bring you down through the years to our day, because actually the liberals recognized what was happening before the fundamentalists woke up to what was happening. I want to give you an excerpt from an editorial that appeared in *The Christian Century* on January 31, 1924.

Two worlds have clashed: the world of tradition and the world of modernism. There is a clash here; it is pronounced and as grim as that between Christianity and Confucianism. Amiable words cannot hide the difference. “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” can be sung in the *Te Deum Sed*, but it cannot bind these two worlds together. The God of the Fundamentalist is one God; the God of the Modernist is another. The Christ of the Fundamentalist is one Christ; the Christ of the Modernist is another. The Bible of the Fundamentalist is one Bible; the Bible of the Modernist is another. The church, the kingdom, the salvation, the consummation of all things—these are one thing to the Fundamentalist and another thing to the Modernist. Which God is the Christian God? Which Christ is the Christian Christ? Which Bible, which church, which kingdom, which salvation, which consummation are Christian? The future alone will tell. But the issue is clear and the inherent, incompatibility of these two worlds has passed the state of mutual toleration.

A *liberal* magazine came out with that! And yet when some of us came out of the liberal machine, we were criticized as being fighters and come-outers. May I say to you, the liberals were the first ones to recognize that we live in two different worlds today, and I’m glad that they stated the case so clearly.

One of the leading liberals of the past was Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick. Some may still remember hearing him speak on the radio. Dr. Fosdick wrote a book titled *The Peril of Worshiping Jesus*, and in it he made what was then a startling statement (it is not so startling today): “The world has tried in two ways to get rid of Jesus, first by crucifying Him and second, by worshiping Him.” Evidently Dr. Fosdick rejects the clear teaching of Scripture such as Hebrews 1:6 and Revelation 13:8.

And way back in the 1930s a survey of Christian ministers revealed that 48 percent of those in the ministry at that time denied the grand particulars of the Christian faith.

Then in 1963, *The Christian Century* contained this statement: “Nothing is so pathetic in modern Protestantism as its confusion over its own faith.” It is interesting to see that they are

the ones who said that time would tell which was the real God. They have been following the liberal, and now they have to say that Protestantism is pathetic. And this is one time that I have to agree with *The Christian Century* thoroughly. These conditions within the church which Jude warned about have been building for a long time—“ungodly men turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying...our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Apostasy — the Word of God

If we want to see how far the church has moved away from the faith, we need to examine how it treats the Word of God. Even the liberals recognize this—the real test lies in your attitude toward the Bible and your viewpoint of it.

I understand that many of the pulpits in Germany are inscribed with this motto: “God’s Word Stands Forever.” I can’t quote the actual German, but that’s the English interpretation. In the back of my pulpit there is written, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” but in Germany they have, “God’s Word Stands Forever.” That’s a tremendous statement! And it was a German, Emil Brunner, who said this: “The fate of the Bible is the fate of Christianity.”

But another German, Professor Otto Michael of Tübingen, said, “The Bible remains the theme of preaching for modern theology, *but it’s no longer the authority for life and thought.* Among the people, generally, its content is rather well-known, *but it is not honored as the divine rule of faith and practice.*” That’s an important distinction, and it’s true in our evangelical circles, as we will see later on. Professor Michael goes on to say, “So Germany, today, lacks a chart for life. It unites other nations, but cannot supply spiritual direction for itself or for them as long as the Bible is unrecognized as the dress for the body of the Word of God.” Although he was speaking in regard to Germany in his day, you could say the same thing about the United States today.

In our last political conventions, did the Republicans mention the Word of God? Did the Democrats mention it? God have mercy on the United States! These Germans have been through a great deal. The Bible provides the direction for Christianity, and the nation of Germany lost its direction when it got away from the Word of God. Maybe that’s the reason the United States can’t lead in the world today. We have departed entirely from the Word of God, and we are looking to men and their programs to solve the problems. The church stands pitiful in this hour.

The notion that much of the Bible is myth has long been held by some Protestant theologians, but they have talked about it publicly only in the last few decades. When I was in the Presbyterian Church there were men all around me who would get up and take an oath that they believed the tenets of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* but didn’t believe it at all. Yet they would take this oath!

A while back I got an insight into what is happening from what a newspaper reporter wrote, although I doubt if he himself recognized what all it meant. Down in Texas there was a meeting of the American Unitarian Association in the Universalist Church of America. An appointed committee gave their report on the goal of the church: “To cherish and spread the universal truths taught by Jesus and the other teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, and express pathetically, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, as love to God and love to man.” Now the delegates of this Unitarian-Universalist convention would not accept this report *because they said it sounded too specifically Christian!* They voted it down. They amended it to read: “To cherish,

to spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition immemorially, summarized in their essence as love to God and love to man.” So the Austin newspaper came out with the headline, “Jesus Ousted By Churches In Merger.” They had put Him out. Note that the first statement read “as taught by Jesus and the other teachers.” That was bad enough, but it was too good for that crowd, and they said, “Out Jesus goes. We don’t even want it to *sound* Christian.”

Is Christ outside the church today? If He’s going to give an invitation to many people today, He’s going to have to knock on the door from the outside because He has already been put out. That is the picture we have of Christ and the organized church today.

I was raised in the Presbyterian Church, and I owe them a great deal. They educated me: I’m a graduate of a Presbyterian prep school, a Presbyterian college, and a Presbyterian seminary. And there are very few Presbyterian ministers today who have that background, I can assure you. But I got out. The Presbyterian Church has adopted a new confession of faith that denies the Trinity and the Person of Christ! I don’t know how any real believer can live with it. The new confession denies the great basic truths of the Christian faith.

Dr. John Gersener, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, once said, “Possibly the greatest loss for Christianity is in the realm of strict doctrine and consistent discipline. The resultant, ‘easy-believe-ism’ leads to inert nominalism, which is more of a disaster to true Christianity than communism, Romanism, secularism, and sectarianism combined.” The apostasy in our churches is worse than any of these other things that men are attacking today. And I could give you multiplied quotations like these, ad infinitum and ad nauseam.

I would like for you to look with me into another area in which the church has moved, in which it has no business going. And that is in this area of trying to tell the Pentagon in Washington about how to conduct a war.

This letter came to me back in May 1936. That’s a long time ago. A great many people think that this business of the church getting involved in war politics is new. But this kind of thing has been going on for many years, as this letter proves. It came from a group called the Emergency Peace Campaign of the National Peace Conference. I’ll not list the names connected with it— they are some of the old liberals, old men now or dead. This is what they wrote: “If we did not think the religious forces of the world could stop war, create the attitude essential to build peace, we would do something other than ask you to join us in this great mission for peace.” Now when World War II came along, none of those men dared stand out when we were at war, they all went undercover. But the minute the war was over, they came out in the same way that after a rain certain creatures come out from under the rocks. They began to spring up everywhere in this country, but they were there all the time and totally disloyal, if you please.

I have a quotation here that identifies “...organizations of so-called anti-war congresses, usually including students and well-meaning liberals, the resolutions of which are written by communists...” This is taken out of a conservative journal that doesn’t indulge in wildfire at all.

Considering that this was what some were doing as far back as the ’30s, it’s not surprising that in the late 1960s there were two thousand clerics involved in protest against the Vietnam War. You see, all of this has been moving in one direction, and it led some who were nationally known writers to come out against it very definitely, such as the following:

Today we wish to submit the companion thought that we find it difficult to understand why clergymen who support such wild talk and wild demands think they are helping their

churches or contributing to the cause of religion. Among the elements of religion are order, authority, charity and peace, and we find none of these in campaigns of civil insurrection. Of 444 persons arrested in recent street disturbances here, 61 of the adult males, 26%, were clergymen.

This appeared in a national magazine.

That is the condition of the church, my beloved, and back of all of this is the rejection of the Word of God and the great premise of the Word of God. And it has been stated like this:

Where education assumes that the moral nature of man is capable of improvement, traditional Christianity assumes that the moral nature of man is corrupt or absolutely bad. Where it is assumed in education that an outside human agent may be instrumental in the moral improvement of man, in traditional Christianity it is assumed that the agent is God, and even so the moral nature of man is not improved but exchanged for a new one.

So you see that there is a direct clash today between the basic premise of the Word of God and the liberal church. How far is their departure from the faith? May I say that it has gone way out!

A fellow minister sees that I receive a little magazine put out by Orthodox Jews, and I've appreciated it very much because I've been interested in the writers' reactions to the issues of Christianity. A while back they met with some liberals who were supposedly representing Christianity, and a Dr. Littel of the Jewish group wrote, "The agony of the breakdown of Jewish-Christian dialogue seven months ago was compounded for some of us by the theological nakedness of leading Protestant churchmen. They had no theological basis to rest upon or historical theology." These Orthodox Jews were appalled that the liberal had no conception at all of God's purposes with the nation Israel, and as a result they accused them of anti-Semitism. And my friend, that's a new twist—liberalism that has boasted of its tolerance and is now being accused of being anti-Semitic because they are theologically naked!

Now I want to bring this closer to home, and it will probably hurt. We read in Jude that they deny their Master and our Lord Jesus Christ. It's easy for you and me to point the finger at the liberal and say, "He denies the Lord, but those of us who are evangelicals, we are wonderful. We haven't denied Him." I say that the evangelical has largely denied Him. He is our Master and our Lord. If you want to know what I mean by this, I would like you to consider what another man has written, Dr. A.W. Tozer, a great man who has gone on to be with the Lord. Notice what he said:

Let me state the cause of my burden. It is this: *Jesus Christ has today almost no authority at all among the groups that call themselves by His Name.* By these, I mean not the Roman Catholics nor the liberals, nor the various quasi-Christian cults. I do mean Protestant churches generally, and I include those that protest the loudest that they are in spiritual descent from our Lord and His apostles, mainly the evangelicals.

Now this may hurt, but continue reading:

It is a basic doctrine of the New Testament that at His resurrection the man Jesus was

declared by God to be both Lord and Christ and that He was invested by the Father with absolute lordship over the church which is His body. All authority is His in heaven and in earth. In His own proper time He will exert it to the full, but during this period in history He allows this authority to be challenged or ignored. And just now it is being challenged by the world and ignored by the church.

The present position of Christ and the gospel churches may be likened to that of a king in a limited constitutional monarchy. The king, sometimes depersonalized by the term “the-crown,” is in such a country no more than a traditional rallying point, a pleasant symbol of unity and loyalty, much like a flag or a national anthem. He is lauded, feted, and supported, but his real authority is small. Nominally, he is head over all, but in every crisis someone else makes the decisions. On formal occasions he appears in his royal attire to deliver the tame, colorless speech put into his mouth by the real rulers of the country. The whole thing may be no more than a good-natured make-believe, but it is rooted in antiquity. It is a lot of fun, and no one wants to give it up.

Among the gospel churches, Christ is now in fact little more than a beloved symbol. “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name” is the church’s national anthem and the cross is their official flag, but in the week-by-week services of the church and the day-by-day conduct of her members someone else, not Christ, makes the decisions. Under proper circumstances Christ is allowed to say, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden,” or “Let not your heart be troubled,” but when the speech is finished, someone else takes over. Those in actual authority decide the moral standards of the church as well as all objectives....

Not only does Christ have little or no authority, His influence also is becoming less and less. I would not say that He has none, only that it is small and diminishing. A fair parallel would be the influence of Abraham Lincoln over the American people. Honest Abe is still the idol of the country. The likeness of his kind, rugged face, so homely that it is beautiful, appears everywhere. It is easy to grow misty-eyed over him. Children are brought up on stories of his love, his honesty and his humility.

But after we have gotten control of our tender emotions, what have we left? No more than a good example which, as it recedes into the past, becomes more and more unreal and exercises less and less real influence. Every scoundrel is ready to wrap Lincoln's long, black coat around him. The cold light of political facts in the United States, the constant appeal to Lincoln by the politicians is a cynical joke.

The Lordship of Jesus is not quite forgotten among Christians, but it has been mostly relegated to the hymnal where all responsibility toward it may be comfortably discharged in a glow of pleasant religious emotion. Or it is taught as a theory in the classroom. It is rarely applied to practical living. The idea that the man Christ Jesus has absolute and final authority over the whole church and over all the members in every detail of their lives is simply not now accepted as truth by the rank and file of evangelical Christians.*

*From “The Waning Authority of Christ in the Churches” in *God Tells the Man Who Cares* by A. W. Tozer. Copyright 1970, 1992 by Christian Publications. Used by permission.

Does that hurt? May I say to you, that's the picture today of the church.

Now let's get right down to the nitty-gritty: How does all this work in life? A great many people today, members of the church, say, "Oh, I love Jesus! I dedicated my life to Him." But where are these people on Sunday evenings? Where will they be on the night that their church holds a Bible study? Where will they be when there's something that *can* be done for Christ today? Where are they? Well, they are willing to sing the songs but not much else.

Let me illustrate this with a poem that came out during World War II. At that time there had been absenteeism in the plants that supplied the needed material to these fellows at Bataan. Some of us remember — we would like to forget it, of course. One day at dusk during the tragic, bloody battle at Bataan, a 19-year-old lad from Indiana scribbled in poetic form the burden of his heart. Early the following morning he was killed. The burial detail found his poem:

And if our lines should sag and break
Because of things you failed to make,
That extra tank, that ship, that plane
For which we waited all in vain.
Will you then come to take the blame?
For we, not you, must pay the cost,
Of battles you, not we, have lost.

With this thought in mind, let's make application to absenteeism in our own church.

Here is another piece that hurts—not a poem exactly—it's called "The Empty Pew."

I am an empty pew.
I vote for the world as against God.
I deny the Bible.
I mock at the preached Word of God.
I rail at Christian fellowship.
I laugh at prayer.
I break the Fourth Commandment;
I am a witness to solemn vows broken.
I advise men to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.
I join my voice with every atheist and rebel against human and divine law.
I am an empty pew.
I am a grave in the midst of the congregation.
Read my epitaph and be wise.

We say we love the Lord, that He is our Master, the Captain of our salvation. But you let a captain in the army call the roll at five in the morning, and they're all present. There is not a one of those fellows who found it easy to get up to be ready for inspection at five in the morning. Don't tell me today that we evangelicals are not denying Him as our Master and our Lord. We are!

We are living in days of apostasy, and we measure ourselves by those around us. We look at Mr. Jones and Mrs. Smith, and we say, "Boy, I'm better than they are!" Maybe you are, but you can't really call Christ your Captain or your Lord. Do you remember He said that there will be

those who after death will stand before Christ and say, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out demons? And in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matthew 7:22). But He will say, “I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:23).

I think that we have come to a day of apostasy that is frightful, and it’s easy to see what’s happening around us and to point it out as I have done here. But what about you and me? I am confident that we are moving into the night and that the time is coming—not too far away—when there will have to be a separation made within the church. If the Rapture doesn’t make the separation, then you can be sure of one thing, the world outside is going to make you pay a price for being a Christian.

It’s interesting what both Peter and Paul have to say about this. In Peter’s second letter we read:

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election [more] sure; for if ye do these things [mentioned in verses 5-9], ye shall never fall.
(2 Peter 1:10)

The apostasy is a falling away, and Peter says here that it might be well for you and for me to give diligence to make our calling and election more sure—because you and I could fall.

When I was in seminary, I sat next to a fine-looking, brilliant young man. He would have been the greatest preacher to come out of our class. He is today a rank atheist! Yet he had ten times the ability and talent that any of the rest of us had. Paul said, “Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves...” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Honestly, in this day of apostasy, when the church everywhere has cooled, what kind of life are you living for Christ? I think that all of us should examine ourselves.

...Know ye not yourselves how Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are discredited? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

This is what Peter and Paul say to us. You may think in this day of apostasy that you can’t be carried away. Well, all of us need to make a personal inventory.