

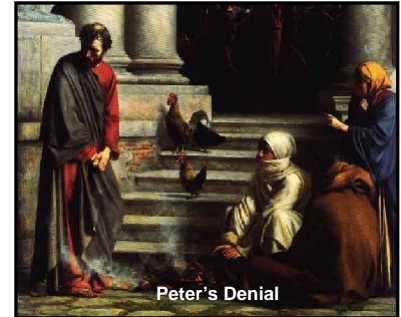
Apostolic Apostasy

[Mark 14:27-31](#)



In our text for this morning we see the Lord making a sad prediction of His Apostles apostasy—which is a pretty sobering subject. Who among us wants to be thought of as weak or prone to stumbling in our Christianity? Stability in the Christian walk is the most admirable of qualities within the ranks of Christians. Yet the warning of Jesus Christ to the men that He had mentored for three years ought to serve as a wake-up call for every Christian.

Each of us has the propensity to fall away from our Christians walk. Robert Robinson captured this idea in the Hymn, “[Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing](#),” when he wrote, “*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*” We all have the proneness to wander and to leave the God that we love when we face difficult times.



You've seen believers go through tough times. You've seen calamity befall them— sometimes of their own doing, but often coming "out of the blue." Many times the calamity is some kind of loss.

- Loss of a loved one to death. Loss of the sanctity of a marriage by infidelity or divorce.
- Loss of a promotion. Loss of a job that pays the bills.
- Loss of a son or daughter who leaves and goes his or her own way, destroying the hope of happiness and creating a huge knot in your stomach.
- Loss of a relationship with a brother or sister.
- Loss of a home by fire.
- Loss of a fortune by foolishness or fraud.

Shortly, Peter and his fellow apostles are to experience the unthinkable—the Man they believe to be the Messiah, the Son of God will be arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified in the space of less than 24 hours. Their own lives will be at risk, too. Their loss will be both unexpected and utterly devastating.

When believers go through difficult times, some fall away, while others gradually get their bearings and recover, usually to become stronger.

And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.' (Mark 14:26-27 NASB)

After singing a hymn, Jesus and the disciples left the upper room in Jerusalem, crossed the [Kidron Brook](#), and began their ascent to their outdoor sanctuary of the Mount of Olives, when Jesus gave them a stark warning, “*You will all fall away...*”

The term used, "fall away," is from the Greek word [skandalizo](#), [skan-dal-id'-zo] it is a common word in the New Testament translated as: “*stumble, offend, and fall away.*” We get our English term, *scandalize* from the Greek root. The essential meaning, virtually every time this word is used in the New Testament,

is that something happens that negatively affects one's walk with Christ. Jesus meaning is that they will desert Him because they are offended by Him. It is the same word used in [Romans 14](#) and [1 Corinthians 8](#) on how to carefully handle your weaker brother so as not to cause him to stumble. Originally, the word was used of a trap or bait stick used in catching an animal.

So Jesus' prediction is that His disciples will be offended at His suffering and death, they will run, they will turn from dependence upon Him, they will fear that what happens to Jesus could also happen to them, they will scatter.

If we consider that these men knew Christ thoroughly, they had witnessed Him raising the dead and calming the raging sea, they had seen Him cast out demons and heal leprosy, it seemed unlikely that they would ever deny Him or fail in standing up for Him in His time of need, but they do.

Jesus warns them and then He quotes from Zechariah:

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.' (Mark 14:27 NASB)

I believe that the Lord is using a [Remez](#) here. In Jesus' day the great teachers used a technique which is today called *remez* or hint, in which they used part of a Scripture passage in discussion, assuming their audience's knowledge of the Bible would allow them to deduce for themselves fuller meaning. Apparently, Jesus used this method often. If you don't know Jesus' text you won't get His point. An example of this is scene in Jesus discussion with John. John is in Herod's jail and He sends his disciples to ask Jesus a question:

Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" (Matthew 11:2-3 NASB)

This is the man who proclaimed ***"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** Was John losing his faith? Was he now uncertain if Jesus was the Christ? A literal rendering of verse 3 is ***"Are you the Coming One?"*** To which Jesus answers:

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. ⁶ "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." (Matthew 11:4-6 NASB)

Notice verse 6 it literally reads, ***"And blessed is he who does not stumble over me."*** The NIV translates it this way, ***"Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."*** The word "stumbling" is *skandalizo* the same word used by Jesus in our text in Mark. What did Jesus say that would cause John to stumble or fall away?

To understand this we need to go back to John's question, ***"Are you the Coming One?"*** Why does John ask this? Why does he call Him the "coming One?" This is from:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold,

your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9 NASB)

Why does John call Him the “coming One?” Because in this context the coming One is going to set the prisoners free:

As for you also, because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. (Zechariah 9:11 NASB)

John is using a remez to ask, “*Am I going to get out of this jail?*” John does not doubt the Messiah; he wants to know if he will get out of jail—to which Jesus replies:

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. ⁶ "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." (Matthew 11:4-6 NASB)

Notice the capitalization in the NASV. Why is it capitalized? It is a Scriptural quote. Here Jesus quotes from:

To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. (Isaiah 42:7 NASB)

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners; (Isaiah 61:1 NASB)

In quoting these verses to John’s disciples Jesus leaves out setting the prisoners free. What is He saying to John? John you are going to die in prison and then He says:

"And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me." (Matthew 11:6 NASB)

That’s hard to hear—you’re going to die in prison. You are not going to be set free. The stumbling may come not from what Jesus is doing but from what He is not doing.

Back to Mark. Let’s look at the verse that Jesus quotes from Zechariah:

"Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate," Declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones. (Zechariah 13:7 NASB)

He turned their thinking to the prophecy of Zechariah to help frame the disciples' understanding of the suffering and death of the Son of God on their behalf. Not that they would understand this at the time of His arrest, but the disciples would soon be able to put together the wonderful story of the gospel that Christ had given them.

Zechariah 13:7 fits perfectly into the context here of Jesus being removed from them and the followers are left to their own devices. However, in the context of the overall flow of Zechariah chapters 12 and 13, the passage referred to the removal of Israel’s military leader. This is what they thought of Christ—He was

going to conquer Rome and set them free. Jesus being put to death would cause them to stumble. The entire passage and not just the half verse which Jesus uses can be used to apply to the situation in which Jesus and the disciples will find themselves. God is going to **“Strike the Shepherd.”** That “striking” was Him being nailed to the cross? It was God’s own work, pouring out His wrath upon His Son.

Isaiah also tells us that God did the smiting:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.
(Isaiah 53:4-6 NASB)

We rattle off a string of names of the people responsible for the death of Christ: **the high priests Annas and Caiaphas** and their hatred; the plotting jealous **Pharisees**; vacillating **Pilate**; the betraying **Judas**; the cruel **soldiers**; & the lying **witnesses**. But the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was delivered up to the cross by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God. It was God’s plan to put his Son to death in that particular way. Scripture says that we are to consider Jesus not stricken by the devil but stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted by God in his sufferings. So Isaiah the prophet, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has declared:

But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. **(Isaiah 53:10 NASB)**

Jesus reminds the disciples in our text what God says in Zechariah, **“I will smite the shepherd.”** I am the one who will do it! Christ was smitten by God and Christ willingly endured the smiting because of his love for us. This death of Christ has fully propitiated the wrath of a great and holy God towards all His elect, so that now God has nothing against us.

Jerry Bridges, the author of a number of very helpful Christian books, tells how he was reading the Bible and praying one morning and thinking about his own falls into sin, feeling quite discouraged with himself. **“God, you would be perfectly just in sending me to hell,” he said. In other words, “You would be perfectly just in smiting me.”** Then, immediately on the heel of those words, came this thought, **“No, you wouldn’t, because Jesus has satisfied your justice for me.”** The Shepherd has already been smitten for our wrongdoing.

Gethsemane's struggle was the smiting of the Shepherd, and the result would be the scattering of the sheep. You can see how true that is if you look forward a bit to:

And they all left Him and fled. **(Mark 14:50 NASB)**

This is the scattering of the sheep. Jesus understood what was to happen that night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Though Jesus had clearly painted for the disciples what would take place, the arrest in the Garden would catch them off guard. Rather than expecting Him to die, they expected Him to do His kingdom work some

other way. The cross seemed insensible to these men that knew Christ best. They saw no reason for Him suffering at the hands of godless men. The truth had been laid out so clearly. But the disciples *wanted something different* than what Christ had foretold. They did not want Him to suffer and die and be raised from the dead and so they fell away.

Let's talk for a minute about apostasy. What exactly is it? Apostasy is: "a falling away, a withdrawal or a defection." When I talk about apostasy and falling away from Christ, I'm talking in terms of our **communion** and not our **union**. We can never lose our union with Christ. We were united to Christ when we placed our trust in Him for our eternal salvation:

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, (Romans 6:5 NASB)

But our communion with Christ, our experiential fellowship, can be lost by our disobedience and unbelief. To lose our communion is to come under the chastening hand of the Lord and suffer temporal judgment. No biblical passage, no warning ever threatens the loss of our union, we can never be separated from our union with God. We must understand this.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39 NASB)

Is our salvation secure? Our salvation is based upon the act of One person—Jesus Christ.

For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19 NASB)

Please get that! The security of our salvation is not based upon our acts. Just as we were all condemned by Adam's act, so also we are made righteous by Jesus Christ's act. We were all condemned through no fault of our own individually, we are also justified through Jesus Christ through no merit of our own. Understanding our condemnation in Adam helps us to see that our salvation is not based upon our works but upon Christ's finished work. Our salvation is secure because it is based upon what Christ did for us, not on what we do for ourselves.

So a believer can fall away from Christ, he can deny Christ, he can be involved in the grossest of sins if he is not careful. Many today teach that a true believer will never apostatize but will always walk in obedience? If that is so, why all the exhortations to believers to STOP sinning? The Bible teaches that a Christian can walk in sin and even turn from the faith. The Bible shows us that believers can live in a sinful state:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NASB)

They were acting like unsaved men. Were the Corinthians saved? The Scriptures make it clear that they were:

to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2 NASB)

I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, (1 Corinthians 1:4 NASB)

so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Corinthians 1:7 NASB)

It should be clear that they were believers, but were they living in obedience? No!

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11 NASB)

But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother [being named a brother-YLT] if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one. (1 Corinthians 5:11 NASB)

The NASB's "so-called" is an interpretation not a translation. The Greek word here is *onomazo*, which means: "to call, to name, to utter the name of a person or thing. It is used 10 times in the Scripture and never means "so-called."

So is it possible for someone who is a Christian to live a sinful life or to turn away from the Christian faith. It happened to Peter the "Rock" (actually Rocky), Peter the Apostle, one of Jesus inner circle.

What causes a believer to fall away in trials? Why do some go through trials trusting in God and others fall away? I think that it has to do with our thinking.

Peter didn't think rightly about himself:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12 NASB)

There is far more wickedness in all our hearts than we know. We can never tell how far we'll fall when we're faced with temptation. When young David was anointed by Samuel to become king, when he killed Goliath with the sling and then destroyed the Philistine army, when the Spirit of prophecy came upon him and he wrote [Psalm 23](#), do you think in the aftermath of those times he'd have believed the Lord if he had warned him not to become a peeping Tom on the roof of his palace, and that that would lead to his adultery, and murder and the death of a child. "Never!" David would have said. "Not me! I'd never take another man's wife and arrange for her husband to be murdered." David was utterly sincere, and completely wrong. There is no degree of sin into which a man of God can not fall. Just wait for the right circumstances and the power of temptation, and unless we are watching and praying we are in deep trouble.

He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But he who walks wisely will be delivered.
(Proverbs 28:26 NASB)

We see this flaw in Peter, he didn't know himself, he thought he was a rock:

But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." (Mark 14:29 NASB)

Peter protested, insisting that Jesus' words would never come true, and that he would remain faithful. Peter was calling our Lord a liar. Peter's pride blinded him from recognizing that Jesus was telling the truth. Jesus perfectly foresaw that Peter and John would find the arrangements for the Passover meal. Jesus had been right in everything He had foretold to this point. Peter had no reason to doubt Him, but his pride got in the way. Peter didn't think this could happen to him.

Peter obviously thought less of his fellow disciples than he did of himself! These other fellows may fall away but not me; I will never, never, never fall away! He thought of himself as above the others, more determined, of greater fortitude, tougher and more rugged than any of them. It's as though he patted himself on the back, having successfully corrected Jesus' assertion.

Notice the contrast between "they" and "I." "They will all deny you," Peter said." I know these fellows, Lord, and you can't trust a one of them! They'll all deny you, you're right about that! But, Lord, you're wrong about me. I will not! Peter is confident that he will not do what the rest will do. He is not at all hesitant to point out that he expects the others to fall, but it is going to be different with him.

Instantly Peter declares, "*Don't worry. I won't leave your side. It's perfectly all right. You can count on me.*" Peter is contradicting Jesus, and not Jesus only but the Bible itself. You are wrong Jesus, he is saying, and so is your use of Scripture. Peter says, maybe they'll all fall away, but I am absolutely certain about one thing. You won't find me letting you down.

And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that you yourself this very night, before a cock crows twice, shall three times deny Me." (Mark 14:30 NASB)

Jesus get very specific here, "You yourself this very night," and He tells him he will deny him three times.

But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing, too. (Mark 14:31 NASB)

He went so far as to declare, "*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.*" The other disciples "*said the same thing too.*" All of them were in the same boat. They devalued the commitment of others and exaggerated their own. Instead of being clothed in humility, they cloaked themselves in pride and self-importance.

As we said earlier, what causes a believer to fall away in trials has to do with their thinking.

1. Peter didn't think right about himself.
2. Peter didn't think correctly about the meaning of Jesus' death.

The coming death of Christ had been explained to them. Some of them had been disciples of John the Baptist, and all of them had heard John preach. The great truth he had told them about Christ was this, ***“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*** When in Caesarea Philippi Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, then immediately Jesus began to tell them of his death and resurrection. He told them that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. He told them that he was the good shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep. He had initiated the Lord’s Supper and he had told them, “This is my body given for you . . . this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

But they were still prisoners of their **tradition** and operating in terms of another view of the Messiah, that he would establish a kingdom and make Israel a great world power. They had no room in their thinking for a suffering dying Messiah.

Peter was ignorant of what would happen because he would not believe the word of Christ. Before you to hard on Peter you must understand that we all do the same thing. When God has spoken something in His Word, and we either willfully choose to ignore it, or we add our own twist to re-interpret it to mean what we want it to mean, or we just deny what it says, then we've done the very same thing that Peter did.

Believers we must think correctly about ourselves and we must think correctly about the Word of God if we are going to keep ourselves from falling away in trials.

So Jesus tells His disciples that they will all fall away, that is a very sad prophecy. But Jesus doesn’t end it there, notice what He says in:

“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” (Mark 14:28 NASB)

The verb **“go before”** is a future, active, indicative which looks at the assured results of a current situation. The pronoun **“you”** is a second person plural. This becomes a promise, I will be in Galilee and you, the eleven disciples, will be there with me.

This is a verse of ultimate forgiveness. Just as Jesus had predicted that all would fall away, with this verse He predicts that He will reunite with His deniers after He is raised from the dead.

The Father would strike Him down but He would also raise Him from the dead. The passive voice very precisely tells us what would take place: **“but after I have been raised.”** Paul explained,

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4 NASB)

It was the Father that put Him to grief and it was the Father that raised Him from the dead, accepting His redemptive work on our behalf, and announcing it in the resurrection.

Jesus told the disciples that after the suffering of death and then the glory of being raised from the dead, **“I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”** Now, let's put this together for a moment. He declared that they would all fall away. The Shepherd would be struck and the sheep scattered. But the certainty of what He would do on the cross and in the resurrection guaranteed that He would rejoin them as triumphant followers of the

Triumphant Christ! They would fall away but it would be temporary, short-lived defeat.

"I will go ahead of you to Galilee"—Jesus is referring to a post-resurrection meeting with his disciples in Galilee such as is described in:

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. ¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20 NASB)

This is a fulfillment of Zechariah 12:7-9 that sees, in the affliction of the Shepherd, the salvation of God's people.

When Jesus had risen from the dead, the angel instructed the women to:

"But go, tell His disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, just as He said to you.'" (Mark 16:7 NASB)

Peter was singled out by name. The angel was saying, "Make sure you tell Peter." Later, at the end of the Fourth Gospel, we find the story of Jesus' special encounter with Peter by the seaside. Peter had failed Jesus, and now Jesus was dealing with the failure.

I'm sure Peter deeply felt his failure. He was hurt and confused. He was embarrassed and humiliated. He was unworthy to sit and eat with His Lord. Yet Jesus sought him out and dealt with his failure. What happened was beautiful. After they had finished breakfast, Jesus says to Peter:

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." (John 21:15 NASB)

The word Jesus used for love is a strong word. It is a form of the word *agape*. It is characteristic of the love of God. In Peter's response, he did not use the same word Jesus used. He used a form of the word *phileo*, which has to do with affection or friendship. Jesus said, *"Peter, do you love Me."* Peter replied, *"You know I am Your friend."* Jesus said, *"Tend My lambs."* A second time, Jesus asked Peter,

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." (John 21:16 NASB)

Again the strong word *agape* was used. Peter replied, *"Yes Lord, You know I am Your friend."* Jesus said, *"Shepherd My sheep."* Jesus pressed him a third time.

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep." (John

21:17 NASB)

This time, Jesus used Peter's word. In essence saying, "Simon, son of John, are you really My friend." The Scripture says, "**Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me.'**" Peter was really grieved because Jesus used his word. The depth of Peter's failure was still like a fresh wound. Peter replied, "**Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You.**" Peter was saying, "Lord, You know my failure. You know how I denied You three times. You know I can't bring myself to use Your word. I am unworthy of it. But You know my heart. You know that I am Your friend." Jesus replied, "**Tend My sheep.**" What Jesus was saying was, "Your denial is not greater than My love. You denied Me three times. Three times I have forgiven you. Tend My sheep."

Believers, I believe that we can prevent apostasy by thinking rightly, Thinking rightly about our God and about ourselves. It's not our great strength and ability that will get us through life—it is trusting in His. Our biggest flops follow our strongest reliance on self. Peter had not yet learned this truth, even though he had walked three years alongside Jesus Christ. Maybe each of us has struggled at just this point as well. What Christ spoke to Peter beckons for our hearts as well. Warnings of our weakness point us to Christ's strength. We must recognize that apart from Christ, apart from dependence upon the grace and strength that He gives, we will fall every time. Trust Him! Only Him!

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