

ing of the simple Gospel of the New Testament, through which it had been possible for people of all ages to be born into the church for which Christ had died.

But Satan never gives up. Men in the late 1800s again began to corrupt the doctrines and practices of the New Testament, so that there was widespread division in the church once more. The challenge to truth sent the remnant back to the Scriptures, to study more closely and to be more deeply convinced about what God had legislated concerning the work of the church, its worship, its organization, and its leadership.

Because of dedication to study, and then to sharing that knowledge with friends and relatives, the church of Christ flourished, in spite of Satan's division, and began to evangelize not only in Europe and America but around the world. Decades of selfless mission work expanded the borders of the kingdom so that there grew to be more Christians outside the US than within her borders.

Satan is vigilant though, while, in contrast, it is typical of humans to grow lax. The prosperity of the church in size and finances brought a feeling of security, which led to laziness in study and outreach. Weak conviction and untaught young Christians opened the door to another wave of

apostasy toward the end of the 20th century.

Once more, heretics in the church are teaching doctrines that violate Scripture. Some have opened the arms of fellowship to the denominational world, saying that the divisive names and doctrines can be overlooked by God's grace. With this acceptance come corruptions of worship, changes in public leadership roles, and other concessions to an increasingly godless culture. Satan is again successfully muddying the water, obscuring truth, and dividing God's Family.

And Christ, through Paul, is begging, "*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

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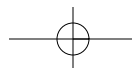
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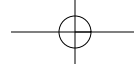
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The Tragedy of Apostasy

J.C. Choate





The Tragedy of Apostasy

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Since his own rebellion against God, Satan has been leading a war. God said of him, “*For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; ...I will be like the Most High’*” (Isaiah 14:13,14).

Satan corrupted Adam and Eve by changing only one word of God’s message to them. He went on to bring the entire population of the world to such a state of evil that washing the earth clean with the waters of the flood was the only answer to the ungodliness.

When our Lord was born, Satan recognized the threat to his goals, so he tried to have Him killed in Bethlehem. Finally, on Calvary, he was sure he was being successful — only to discover with the resurrection that he, himself, had been a useful instrument in making the way of salvation for all who would come to Christ in faith and obedience.

Through the shedding of His blood, Christ purchased what He chose to call His church. It had its beginning on the first Day of Pentecost after His resurrection. A clear message of ‘good news’ was preached, people obeyed, and **great**

numbers of souls began to pass through the door of His blood, in baptism, into the church.

What was Satan’s response? Was he defeated? No, he understood that the price for salvation had been paid, and there was nothing he could do about that. And he knew that, as the story of the love and sacrifice of Christ was taken to the world, people would believe it. They would want to follow such a righteous leader who had been willing to die for them. That message couldn’t be changed.

But if he could **lie about the message**, and **confuse the hearers with half-truths**, he could still thwart much of what God intended.

So Satan looked at the plan of God: There would be **the great dividing line** between the people in the world and the people in God’s family, the Christians — the church. If Satan could **keep people from finding that Family**, if he could **confuse the teachings so that they would not learn how to be born into that Family**, then he would have won. Most of the people of the world would still be outside of the church, lost in their sins, because they had heard and believed lies about how to *become* a Christian.

The apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, warned in Acts 20:29, 30: “*For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will*

come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

Even during the lifetime of the apostles, leaders within the church were corrupting the purity of the Gospel with doctrines whose followers came to be known as Gnostics, Monatists, Marcionites, and others. 1 Timothy 1:1-3 warned: “*... some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*”

The error that had been foretold brought about the formation of the Roman Catholic Church in 606 A.D. Further division obscured the truth and the church of Christ even more. Denominations, each with its own variant name and doctrine, came into existence from the 16th century onward. Because of the hundreds of divisions among those who claimed to believe in Christ, His church became more and more difficult to identify. Finally, in the 19th century, numerous men in Europe and America awakened to the need for a “restoration” of the teach-

