

Apostates are Hidden Reefs

by Fred DeRuvo – Study-Grow-Know Ministries

Korah thought that his coup against Moses and Aaron would impress the people, and I'm sure he thought that *he* would become their new leader or that he would be successful in knocking Moses off his pedestal so that the Israelites would be able to live the way they wanted to live. I'd be willing to bet these "men of renown" were ready to take Moses' place in an instant.

Korah did not want Moses to be in authority any longer, and obviously, at least 250 others agreed. In the end, they all died because they were opposed to God, not simply Moses. This is the problem with pride. It may *appear* to be intelligent and meaningful at first, but when it is unmasked and shown for what it is, it is clearly seen that pride attacks God at every turn. It is the *worst* of sins because it is the *root* of most of them.

Those who are filled with pride will do whatever it takes to puff themselves up further in their attempts to reduce God to nothing. Satan was the first to try this and he fell as a result. Adam and Eve were convinced by Satan that they could get out from under God's rule by eating of the forbidden fruit, which would open their eyes, allowing them to see their own inner deity. They obeyed Satan and fell just as He had done. It is for this reason the Scriptures say, "*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (cf. Proverbs 16:18). From pride, nothing good springs forth. It always destroys, and this is reason enough why God hates it.

The apostate often truly believes that his actions, teaching, and demeanor are in line with what God wants, but rarely, if ever, is this the case, and of course his view of God is certainly skewed. Normally, the apostate stands opposed to God, and while some may not realize it, too many apostates know exactly what they are doing.

Hidden Reefs

After providing these three examples of what apostates are like, Jude likens them to "hidden reefs." How apropos is that? Anyone who has a boat or who has gone swimming in the ocean near coral reefs knows how much damage these reefs can cause.

Reefs are beautiful to look at. They are covered with coral of all sorts of colors, and the way they reflect the light is fascinating. The design of a coral reef is also very intriguing, almost beguiling. Because of this, their inherent danger is often hidden. The cut sustained from a piece of coral is akin to being cut with glass. It is not uncommon for a reef to gouge or rip open the hull of a small boat or severely cut a swimmer who is unaware of the reef's presence and accidentally dives onto it.

That's the interesting thing about coral. It *looks* beautiful on the outside and therefore is often attractive to us, but it is *dangerous*. Apostates are often charming people who have an air of intelligence, depth, and *seem* to be genuinely interested in people. All too often, though, people are completely unaware of the danger until they get totally sucked in and wind up under the apostate's control.

Think of Jim Jones, Father Divine, David Koresh, and any other individual like them that comes to mind. Initially, these people were charismatic, acting like magnets to other people. You wanted to be around them because they were fun, exciting, inviting or embracing.

You felt loved. You felt as if the person was supremely interested in you and you alone. That's how people get sucked in: because of the sense of excitement and belonging. It didn't matter that some of what was heard when they preached was not quite right and red flags went off. What mattered is *how you felt*.

Apostates capitalize on this feeling that people have about themselves. They know that most people are insecure to some extent, so if they can find their insecurity then use it to draw that person close to them, the apostate knows that he will be able to pull them in and they will be theirs.

It's no wonder that Jude – though he initially felt compelled to write about salvation – felt it even more important to stress the character of the apostate and the way the apostate worms his way into the congregation *first*, and then into the hearts of the people *next*.

As attractive and inviting as that apostate may be on the outside, he is like a hidden reef, with nothing but danger and disaster waiting for those who bring their boats too close. Once they get to that point, though, it is often too late in most cases, and history has given us that lesson repeatedly.

Love Feasts

The apostate fits right in with the local congregation to such an extent that they sidle up to folks during their love feasts (dinners usually served prior to the Lord's Supper). They blend in easily, and most are not aware that they are there with ulterior motives and are partaking of not only the love feast, but also of the Lord's Supper.

The apostate doesn't care that he is partaking in judgment because his heart is not in the right place when he bows his head in remembering the painful death of our Lord and Savior. This doesn't matter, because like the priests in Ezekiel who worshiped idols in secret so that the Israelites were not aware of it (but God was), the apostate keeps up the façade of being a true servant of God, all the while serving only himself. People like this tend to believe that their secret agenda is safe from all eyes, including God's eyes.

Jude's Description

Jude carries his description of apostates onward, wanting to ensure that his readers get the point. He wants them to know in no uncertain terms how despicable the apostate's actions are as they mingle with the congregation. Jude calls them clouds without water, carried along by winds.

I used to live in upstate New York. It's normally green throughout the year, except, of course, in winter because of the humidity and rainfall. Without the rain, things would look brown, like they do in California during the summer.

Apostates are not like clouds that bring refreshing, life-giving water. They may look like clouds, but they have nothing within them that benefits anyone else.

It is of course even worse when these apostates become leaders in a local church. They often gain these positions because of their charm, their good-natured personality, or their overall charisma and self-assurance.

Once they begin teaching, though their overall appearance and demeanor may *promise* "rain" (spirituality), they often bring nothing. I can think of a number of people who have done great harm in the Name of Jesus because of what they preach. Yet these individuals have a very large following because of their charisma and charm. They normally have large personalities, making it difficult for the average person to disagree with them.

On days when the humidity was high in New York, you always looked for a coming storm, because you knew that the rain would reduce the humidity. It was like letting the air out of a balloon. It normally always felt good.

The clouds that passed overhead and released no water did nothing to relieve the humidity, and in fact, sometimes the humidity seemed to *increase* because of the additional pressure system that clouds can help create. Rain was needed, and clouds that passed overhead and did not have water to release were simply pretty to look at, and that was all.

Jude's next bit of imagery has to do with trees. He describes apostates as "*autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted.*" Yesterday, my wife brought home fruit from a Farmer's Market near her work. One of my favorite fruits is the peach. My wife likes them crunchy, but I like them ripe and soft. To me, they are far tastier when they are just overly ripe. They also smell wonderful. I love good fruit, whether it's a peach or an orange. If it's good and ripe, then I know I'll enjoy it.

We have an orange tree in our backyard that has been there since we planted it shortly after we moved in twelve years ago. Even though the tree *looks* healthy with nice green leaves and new growth every year, it has not produced a single orange in all that time. It only looks good, but produces nothing edible. It even tried this year, starting to produce an

orange that got to the size of a marble, and then it was gone. We've thought many times about uprooting it and getting rid of it since as a fruit tree, it's not doing its intended job.

This is the apostate. While he may appear to be something of quality on the outside, the fact that he produces no real fruit is the key indicator that something is terribly wrong.

We could probably look at just about any church in America and find people who do not produce any fruit. Some of these people are clearly very needy and it is obvious they attend church to have their own needs met and are not at all interested in giving back by using the gifts God gave them to help edify the congregation (if they are authentic Christians).

It may also be that at least some of these people are *not* authentic Christians and are simply there for their own reasons. They may either believe that they are indeed true believers, or they *know* they're not. In the case of the latter, they are likely there for no good reason.

Jude knows how difficult it is sometimes to identify the type of person he is referring to, so he provides many examples and pictures to help leaders narrow down that process. Clouds without rain and trees without fruit are two ways that he endeavors to help people learn to judge the difference so that these apostates become more *noticeable*.

That's our show for today. Thank you so much for joining me. We are continuing in the book of Jude next time as well. Until we meet again, may the Lord open your eyes to show you how blessed you are in Him!