

Five Reasons That Some Fall Away

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of enduring in faith and fruitfulness for the long haul, using examples from the Bible to illustrate how individuals can fall away from their faith due to desires conflicting with Christian beliefs. The speaker urges listeners to prioritize holiness over worldly desires, highlighting the deceitfulness of sin as a key factor in spiritual shipwreck. Ultimately, the message reassures believers of God's faithfulness in preserving His chosen ones and encourages them to confirm their calling and election by savoring holiness.

Scripture: John 3:19, Romans 8:30, 1 John 2:19, 2 Peter 1:10

Topics: "Endurance in Faith", "Prioritizing Holiness"

Description

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Transcript

Father, what gifts you have given to us in these young people, their words, their heart, their mind. Thank you. I pray for them and for all of us that we would persevere now as we take hold of this unchanging God, your very self.

In Jesus' name, amen. My aim in these next few minutes is to provide another incentive for the perseverance of your faith and your fruitfulness in the next 70 years. Or to say it another way, my aim is to sharpen your sword so that you can fend off the forces that threaten your faith and your fruitfulness for the next 70 years.

And I choose the number 70 because a few of you will live that long. Not many. A few will live that long, and because 2022 marks the 70th anniversary of my becoming a Christian.

And I have been pondering a lot with a kind of trembling, thankfulness, and wonder at how God has held on to me. And that is what I want for you. Will you, and I will broaden it out, will you endure to the end? The word deconversion is not in the Oxford English Dictionary as of Monday.

It's in the Dictionary of the American Psychological Association. Words are created to name reality, not the other way around. We didn't need the word deconversion.

We didn't need it because the Bible abounds with words and descriptions of people who forsake Christ. For example, apostasy, 2 Thessalonians 2, 3. Falling away, Matthew 24. Shipwreck of faith, 1 Timothy 1. Turning back from following the Lord, Zephaniah 1. Trampling underfoot the Son of God, Hebrews 10.

Going out from us, 1 John 2. The cutting off of a branch, John 15. Becoming disqualified, 1 Corinthians 9. Turning away from listening to the truth, 2 Timothy 4. Denying the Master who bought them, 2 Peter 2. We didn't need a new word. And my guess is, this is just a guess, that the new word, deconversion, came into existence so that the old, foolish, tragic, heartbreaking reality could feel trendy.

As trendy as the word. If it lay in my power, I would spare you this. The trendy tragedy.

Young people, it is a wonderful thing to remain a Christian for 70 years. It is wonderful to stand like Polycarp, right? AD 155, and say before his murderers, for 86 years I have been Christ's servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me? For some of you, that will be 60 years from now.

Would it not be glorious to say that when you turn 86? Yes, it would. Did you know that the 14-gallon yew tree in Scotland may be 5,000 years old? The oldest living thing in Great Britain? Just go online and enjoy. It's still standing.

You won't live 5,000 years on earth, but many of you will live three or four or five or six or seven more decades, and I hope you will feel this. It is a wonderful thing to be like a tree and not a reed shaken by the wind. An old tree, gnarly, wrinkled, old, battered, winter after Minnesota winter.

How can it be? Storm after storm, still standing. Become that. Become that kind of tree.

So the incentive that I want to give you for your endurance, and all of you, I hope you will take it, the sword sharpening that I offer to fend off the forces of apostasy falling away, making shipwreck, being part of the trendy tragedy of deconversion, is this. Be aware that the shipwreck of the Christian faith is owing most deeply not to the mind's problems with history, science, logic, or ethics, but to the heart's overpowering desire for something that doesn't fit the Christian faith. We stumble over the cliff of apostasy, not because there's no light, but because we love the dark.

Light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil, John 3.19. This came home to me recently when somebody asked me, what do you think Paul meant when he said shipwreck of your faith? What did he mean by shipwreck of your faith? And to answer that, I said, okay, I'm going to do a quick Bible run through of events where this happened. And I'm going to share with you now five quick illustrations where it happened, and you discern with me why it happened. And I come to the end thinking, I don't think there are any exceptions to this in the Bible.

Okay, number one, third soil of the parable of the soils. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear as they go on their way, and they're choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. So here they are making a good beginning.

Good beginning. How long? I don't know how long. And something went wrong.

Something was their downfall. What was it? Cares, riches, pleasures of life. Whatever the presenting issues were in their head or what they said to other people, Jesus says, fear of losing things and desire of gaining things and cravings for the pleasures of the world are the rocks on which the faith founders.

Number two, in Philemon, chapter one, verse, well, there's only one chapter in Philemon, 124, Demas was a fellow worker of Paul, and he's listed right beside Luke. I'd like to be listed beside Luke. So he must have been a stunning Christian as far as Paul could tell, because Paul's standards for who he'll work with are really high.

He would not work with John Mark because he quit halfway through. He's out of here. I don't work with people like that, but Demas, I'll work with Demas.

And in 2 Timothy 4.10, Demas, in love with this present age, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. What happened? In love, in love, in love with the present world. It was a love issue.

Number three, 1 Timothy 1.18, Paul tells Timothy, wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience by rejecting this, the good conscience, some have made shipwreck of their faith among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander. How did Hymenaeus and Alexander make shipwreck of their faith? They rejected a good conscience. What does that mean? Their conscience was saying, rightly, those desires for sin are not the way of Christ.

Those desires for sin, you cannot navigate those. You will not make it through those rocks. You won't.

We reject you, voice of conscience. And they made shipwreck of their faith by rejecting a good conscience. Number four, 2 Peter 2.20, if after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse than the first.

In other words, the knowledge of Christ and the beginnings of sanctification, aborted. Why? Because like Lot's wife, they looked back with overpowering desire and were entangled again in the defilement of the world. Number five.

So we've heard from Jesus. We've heard from Paul. We've heard from Peter.

Let's hear from Hebrews chapter three. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. So what's the danger that Hebrews warns against? What could lead to the hardening of heart and the falling away from the living God? Answer, the deceitfulness of sin. Sin, the heart's preference for this world over God.

One, the shipwreck of the third soil, riches and the pleasures of life. The shipwreck of Demas, love for this age. The shipwreck of Hymenaeus and Alexander, rejecting a good conscience.

The shipwreck of those who escape defilements is becoming entangled with them again. And the warning against shipwreck in Hebrews three, the deceitfulness of sin. I don't think there are any exceptions to this pattern in the Bible.

The root cause of apostasy or falling away or shipwreck of faith or deconversion is not the failure to detect truth, but the failure to desire holiness. It's not, the root cause is not the absence of light, but the love for the dark. It is not problems of science, but the preference for sin.

Here's Jesus, one of the most amazing verses in the Bible. If anyone's will is to do God's will, you'll know, you'll know whether the teaching is from God or whether I'm speaking on my own authority. If the inclination of the heart is right, the illumination of the mind will be bright.

That's what he says. Now we all know, you have been well taught, God never loses any of his elect. None of his predestined children is ever lost.

For those whom he predestined he called, and those whom he called he justified, and those whom he justified he glorified. None deconverts. Finally, the ship of saving faith always makes it home to the haven.

No exceptions. They went out from us because they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out.

And it may become plain that they're not of us. First John 2.19. So be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and your election, Peter says, and you will never fall. God is faithful.

Those whom he calls he keeps. He will do it, but he uses means. You will be kept from shipwreck not only by seeing the way of truth, but by savoring the way of holiness.

Because without the savoring of holiness, the seeing of truth is lost. Father, with the Bible, I pray for the graduates and all of us, whether we have a year to live or 70 more years to live, that you'd keep us, that you'd hold us fast, that you'd give us a thousand tongues to sing your praises, not just because you're true, but because you are satisfying. I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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