

# PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

## Lesson – 11

### "The Problem of Spiritual Defection"

#### INTRODUCTION:

- I. Most of us who are Christians might find it very hard to understand why anyone would defect from Jesus Christ.
  - A. To the faithful, devout Christian, turning away from Jesus Christ would be worse than becoming a traitor to the United States of America.
    1. How ANYONE, after experiencing the life-giving freedom of Christ's love, could throw it all away and walk back into sin is unthinkable.
    2. And yet, the truth of the matter is that it happens far more than we care to admit.
      - a. There probably isn't a single congregation of the Lord's people that hasn't seen someone defect back into the world.
      - b. Perhaps, even some of you have done that in your past.
      - c. And perhaps there may be someone of here now who is seriously thinking about it.

- (1). Maybe I'm talking to someone right now, who for all practical purposes, has already defected in your heart – although you haven't quit attending worship services yet.
- d. Maybe someone is here who defected in the past, and has seen the other side of the world, and you want so desperately to have a good reason to come back to Jesus Christ.
3. Let's take some time to closely examine this problem of spiritual defection in the life of Christians and attempt to discover a few things.
  - a. Specifically, I want us to look at God's perspective on defection – to find out how it happens, and learn how we can come back home again if defection has already taken place.

## **BODY:**

- I. Surprisingly, the Scriptures offer us a number of examples of spiritual defection.
  - A. But perhaps the best example, for our purposes, is found in the book of Jeremiah the prophet. **(Jeremiah 2)**
    1. In spite of God's leadership, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was sometimes a little wishy-washy when it came to following the Lord.

(The Southern Kingdom of Judah was one of the two Kingdoms that existed in Israel after a civil war divided the country.)

- a. At times their hearts would be AFLAME for Jehovah.
  - b. But at other times, that brilliant flame would get doused and they would soon forget that it had ever burned.
2. This is the primary reason God called Jeremiah to preach to the people.
- a. And Jeremiah spent much of his time dealing with the spiritual stagnation and the cesspools of sin that plagued the people of God in his day.
  - b. Jeremiah was called "the weeping prophet."
    - (1). I don't think he wept because he was trying to manipulate the people – it wasn't some kind of cheep emotional trick to get the people of Judah back on track.
    - (2). He wept because he was deeply touched by the sin in people's lives, and knew how spiritually bankrupt they had become.
    - (3). He was moved with compassion as he saw people dying in their sin and rebellion, and they didn't even KNOW they were dying.

- c. Therefore, God called Jeremiah to prophesy to the people, and to get them to remember the EARLIER days when their hearts burned bright in the love for the Lord.
- II. God appeals to His people by telling Jeremiah to speak of three things –  
Remind them of the past, Rebuke them for the present, and Reveal to them the future.
- A. First, Jehovah wanted Jeremiah to remind them of the past.
    1. **Jeremiah 2:2-3** – *"Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holiness to the LORD, the firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the LORD."*
    2. God wanted Jeremiah to remind these people of how it USED to be.
      - a. The Lord has some very fond memories of the warm, loving relationship He ONCE enjoyed with His people.
      - b. Jehovah remembers with fondness the faithful zeal that ONCE burned brightly in the hearts of the people of Judah.
    3. When you think back about your relationship with the Lord in previous years, do you remember a time like that?

- a. Do you remember a time when you were "devoted to the Lord."
- b. Do you remember times when you made promises to God – how you promised to love Him and His Son, Jesus to the day you die?
- c. Do you remember faithfully following Him every step of the way, and how blessed your life was then.
- d. That's what God wants all who have defected to do, He wants them to REMEMBER THE PAST.

B. Second, Jehovah wanted Jeremiah to rebuke them for the present.

1. **Jeremiah 2:5-8** – *Thus says the LORD: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters? Neither did they say, 'Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and the shadow of death, through a land that no one crossed and where no one dwelt?' I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also*

*transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit."*

2. God wanted Jeremiah to be honest with the people and lovingly confront them with their defection.
  - a. They were in a state of denial – they would have argued that they had NOT defected from the Lord.
  - b. So, they needed to have someone come to them and tell them the VERY things they didn't want to hear.
    - (1). Thank God! for people like Samuel who have the courage to stand up to the Saul's among us and say, "God would rather have your faithful obedience, than all your phony religious services."
    - (2). Thank God! for people like Nathan who have the courage to stand up to the David's among us and say, "You are the VERY sinner I'm talking about. You! – not someone else. You!"
    - (3). And thank God! for people like Jeremiah who have the courage to stand up to the spiritual defectors among us and lovingly say, "What has God done to YOU to deserve the kind of treatment you're giving HIM?"

3. When you look in the mirror – I mean REALLY look in the mirror, what do you see? When you look hard at your present condition, what do you see?
  - a. Do you see someone who is blaming God for not treating you fairly?
  - b. Do you see someone who left the fullness of God to walk after "emptiness" and now YOU ARE "empty?"
  - c. Do you see someone who believes God has abandoned you, but who in reality, has abandoned God?
4. That's what God wants all who have defected to see, He wants them to SEE THEIR PRESENT EMPTINESS.
  - a. The Lord wants us to remember the wonderful fellowship and joy we ONCE had when we first committed our life to Christ.
    - (1). He wants us to remember how determined we were to be a strong, faithful Christian.
    - (2). He wants us to remember how much we loved sitting in Bible classes or listening to sermons that told us the wonderful story of Jesus Christ and His love for us.
  - b. Then the Lord wants us to look at where we are today – EMPTY!
    - (1). The REAL joy that once FILLED our heart is gone.

- (2). The LOVE for the Lord that once burned like a HOT FLAME in our heart has now all but been extinguished.
  - (3). We CONSTANTLY try to push spiritual thoughts out of our mind – but, no matter how hard we try, we still think about facing the Lord in judgment someday, and we know DEEP DOWN in our heart just how TERRIFYING that moment will be.
  - (4). And we feel ashamed – we’ve turned our back on our God and on His Son, Jesus Christ, and on our brethren, perhaps even on our family (spiritually speaking).
    - (a). We’ve wished SO MANY TIMES that we could find the courage to come back to the Lord, but we’ve convinced ourselves that the Lord doesn’t have any room for spiritual defectors.
    - (b). And beside, those folks at church are ALWAYS going to look at us differently – they’ll never forget that we once abandoned the Lord. And SOME of them will NEVER let us FORGET it either.
- C. Finally, Jehovah wanted Jeremiah to reveal to them the future.
1. **Jeremiah 2:18-19** – *"And now why take the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River? Your own wickedness will correct you, and*

*your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and the fear of Me is not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts.*

2. God wanted Jeremiah to warn them of where their spiritual defection will lead them.
  - a. They were on the wrong road – they were heading for "Egypt" and "Assyria."
    - (1). These two nations were symbolic of godlessness and evil – and worse yet, they were symbolic of SLAVERY.
    - (2). The road they were taking was leading them to further godlessness and evil.
    - (3). Eventually, the road they were taking will lead them into a kind of slavery and bondage from which many of them will NEVER be able to escape.
3. When you look up the road ahead of you, what do you see?
  - a. Do you see what LOOKS LIKE rivers flowing with cool, sweet, refreshing water, but, in reality, are filled with stench and filth?
  - b. Do you see that the end of the road isn't what it SEEMS to be, and that in the end, all the sweetness will turn bitter?
  - c. Do you see that you are forsaking the God of heaven, Who loved you enough to give His Son for you, and that you are

becoming less and less worried about the consequences of rejecting that love?

4. That's what God wants ALL who have defected to see, He wants them to CLEARLY SEE WHERE THEY'RE HEADED – the CONSEQUENCES THEY WILL FACE UP THE ROAD.
- C. You would think with an appeal like this, the people of Judah would have turned back to the Lord.
1. Unfortunately, the Lord's plea fell on deaf ears.
- III. The steps that led to Judah's defection are not unlike the steps that lead to the defection of God's people today.
- A. I don't know of anyone who woke up one morning and said, "I think this will be a GREAT day to defect!"
1. No one that I know took deliberately planned calculated steps to spiritually defect.
    - a. Those steps are usually taken carelessly and thoughtlessly, with little or no concern about where those steps will eventually lead.
- B. So, let's look at five principles of defection that are found in Jeremiah chapter two.
1. First – Defection does not occur suddenly.

- a. **Jeremiah 2:5** – *Thus says the LORD: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me."*  
The NIV says, *"What fault did your fathers find in me, that they STRAYED so far from me?"*
  - b. Loyalty and love aren't washed away is some kind of sudden flash flood.
  - c. Instead, they erode little by little – one compromise after another, after another, until there is nothing left to compromise. We STRAY from the Lord.
  - d. Most people don't even realize that this kind of spiritual erosion is taking place until it's too late.
2. Second – Defection most often occurs in times of blessing.
    - a. **Jeremiah 2:7** – *"I brought you into a bountiful country, to eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination. "*
    - b. This might surprise you, but most people defect during relatively good times, than bad.
    - c. Why? Times of prosperity often silently allure us into focusing our attention more on material things than spiritual things.
      - (1). It's during these times that we're most vulnerable.
  3. Third – Defection seems to flourish under loose leadership.

- a. **Jeremiah 2:8** – *"The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; the rulers also transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit."*
  - b. When spiritual leaders aren't doing their job of LEADING – people quit following.
  - c. It seemed that the spiritual leaders in Jeremiah's day were only paying lip service to Jehovah – they may have been SAYING all the right things, but they didn't KNOW the Lord.
    - (1). They were just going through all the motions of being religious.
  - d. When spiritual leaders are too concerned about their own lives, and what's important to them, those who are in danger of spiritual defection will leave – and most of those who STAY won't even notice the others are gone, let alone really care.
4. Fourth – Defection involves two specific sins: "forsaking the true God" and "finding an empty substitute."
- a. **Jeremiah 2:13** – *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water."*
  - b. Defectors don't just ABANDON God, they REPLACE Him.

- c. The tragedy is that defectors replace the gracious God of heaven with spiritual and emotional emptiness.
  - (1). I can't tell you how many times I've talked to spiritual defectors who have WEPT over how empty their lives had become.
  - (2). There was ONCE a "fullness" – there was "bread enough and to spare" around the Father's table, but now that these spiritual defectors are out in some foreign country (far from home), they are "perishing with hunger."
- 5. Finally – Defection brings its own consequences.
  - a. **Jeremiah 2:19** – *"Your own wickedness will correct you, and your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God, and the fear of Me is not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts.*
  - b. This is the saddest picture of all – it isn't the Lord who loses when we defect, IT'S US!
  - c. The price of defection is painfully high.
  - d. But, as unbelievable as this may seem, it's a price some are willing to pay.

## CONCLUSION:

- I. Do you feel the stirrings of defection in your heart?
  - A. It's a serious problem – but there IS hope.
    1. If you're a child of God, I want you to know one thing – **GOD ISN'T GOING TO LET YOU GO WITHOUT A FIGHT!**
      - a. Your heavenly Father will follow you to the ends of the earth to call you back to Him.
        - (1). There is simply no where we can go to escape the Lord's presence. **(cf. Psalms 139:7-12)**
      - b. Do you remember how Jesus portrayed God in Luke chapter 15?
        - (1). In the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, Jesus portrays God as a God who goes to ANY extreme to seek and find that which is lost.
        - (2). In the parable of the Lost Son (sometimes called the "Prodigal Son"), Jesus portrays God as a God who has tender compassion and UNLIMITED mercy and forgiveness for his erring children.
    - c. Every day you awake, God is calling you to come back home – just like He did to the people in Jeremiah's day.

(1). **Jeremiah 3:12-13** – *"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the LORD."*

B. I would like to tell you the story of Duane and Virginia.

1. In the mid-1960s, Duane was going through a really difficult time in his life.
2. His wife Virginia had become unfaithful, and to make matters even worse, the couple had five young children, as I recall, all of whom were close in age.
  - a. In those days, Duane was a milk delivery man, and used to take his children with him on his route because Virginia was often still out in the early morning hours when Duane needed to leave for work.
  - b. There were so many times he wanted to simply divorce his wife, but for the sake of his young children, he fought back the

tears, and choked down the sorrow that welled up in his throat, and kept on going.

- c. Although Duane was a Christian, and a member of the Lord's church in a small community, he at the lowest point in his life, and his brothers and sisters in Christ didn't offer him any help or encouragement – he was literally fighting this battle alone.
3. However, one day, a customer offered Duane the kind of help he needed – this man and his wife offered to care for Duane's children anytime they were needed, and when Duane was running low on money to feed and care for his children, this couple lovingly gave him the money he needed.
    - a. While Duane was a member of the local church of Christ, this couple were members of a local denomination.
    - b. Feeling abandoned by his own brethren, Duane began attending church with this couple, and soon became a member of that church.
    - c. Although he couldn't accept ALL that denomination taught – such as the practice of baptizing babies, and of baptizing by sprinkling, to name a few – he felt perhaps he could be an influence for good, and help these people see what the Bible really teaches on these things.

4. Over the years, Duane became more and more involved in that church until he was eventually appointed “Superintendent of Sunday Schools.”
  - a. By this time, Duane and Virginia were much older, most of the children were grown and married, and, happily, Virginia was no longer having affairs.
  - b. But he still had an uneasy gnawing in the back of his mind – he knew where he should be, but felt he had not only **CROSSED** the “bridge of no return,” he had **BURNED** it.
5. Eventually, Duane reached his senior years, and his health was beginning to fail. Virginia’s health was also deteriorating, and she was dealing with the added burden of deep depression over her past.
  - a. Duane and Virginia were now attending services at that church only once or twice a month, and eventually stopped going except for certain holiday services.
6. I was told about Duane and Virginia, and that practically everyone had simply written him off as a lost cause. Few, if any members of the Lord’s church in that community, really cared about him anymore. He was a deserter – someone who had sold themselves out to denominational error.
  - a. But I went to visit them anyway.

- b. Duane unfolded the whole story of his life, and even though his own brethren had let him down at a period of time when he needed them most, he had long since gotten over the bitterness and resentment.
  - c. He knew he had deserted the Lord, and that the fundamental teachings and practices of the denomination he had become a member of were all contrary to what the Bible taught.
  - d. He deeply regretted ever leaving the Lord, and wanted so badly to come back.
7. And so, I talked with Duane and Virginia, and told them that the Lord still loved them, and wanted them to come home.
- a. That's all they needed – all they needed was just SOMEONE (ANYONE) to tell them that it was okay to come back.
  - b. And they did. We prayed together in their home, and three days later on Sunday, they were present at church, and asked me to read a statement saying they wanted to be forgiven for all they had done in their past, that they deeply regretted all the mistakes they had made, and wanted to come back to the Lord.
  - c. They were restored that day.

8. But that's not the end of the story, for within a year, Duane's health took a sudden turn for the worse, and in a matter of days, he was gone.
  9. But the GOOD news is that Duane died a faithful Christian – a Christian who had once turned his back on the Lord and the Lord's church, but had finally returned to spend his final days in fellowship with the Lord and the Lord's people.
- C. You see, it's doesn't matter whether you've played the prodigal son and have squandered your spiritual inheritance in self-centered, sinful living, or whether you have allowed something to turn YOU sour against some HORRIBLE wrong that was done to you by those who call themselves Christians, the LORD is still pleading with you to come home.
1. You're Father has been waiting for you – He's waiting now.
  2. All you have to do is take the first step – and He'll do the rest.
  3. All the Lord asks you is to do the same thing He asked the people of Israel in Jeremiah's day.
    - a. *“Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God.” (Jeremiah 3:13)*