

The Great Falling Away

2Thessalonians 2:1-5

The Lord Is Coming Again

- Heb. 9:27-28 - “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”
- Matt. 25:31-32 - “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

What The Return Of The Lord Means For Us

- 1Thes. 4:16-17 - “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”
- 1Cor. 15:51-54 - “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.”

The Great Falling Away

- But before that day comes, the apostle Paul prophesied of a great falling away
 - 2Thes. 2:1-5 - “Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. 3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”

The Great Falling Away

- What is the “great falling away”?
 - It appears that he is saying that a great falling away or apostasy will precede the Second Coming of Christ.
 - Is he predicting a descent into abject immorality like that of Noah’s day?
 - Is he describing a specific apostasy that is now part of the history of Christianity?
 - Or is there some other meaning of a great falling away?

Great Fallings Away

- 1Tim. 3:1-7 and the qualifications of bishops...
 - Do Roman Catholic bishops meet these qualifications?
- 2John 9 and the doctrine of Christ...
 - Do modern denominational doctrines harmonize with this?
- Col. 3:16 and singing in worship...
 - Do contemporary religious organizations comply with this?

Great Fallings Away

- There have been countless fallings away over the past 2000 years. Men have often departed from God's way
 - Cain's unacceptable sacrifice
 - Nadab and Abihu's unauthorized fire
 - Jereboam's golden calf
 - David's ox cart

Great Fallings Away

- “For that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.” Until all apostasy (apostasias) shall have occurred--the great apostasy. There is scarcely any passage of the New Testament which has given occasion to greater diversity of opinion than this.”
(Barnes Notes)

Great Fallings Away

- Possibilities
 - A great apostasy before the fall of Jerusalem
 - The rise of Catholicism
 - The coming of Islam
 - The development of Protestant denominationalism
 - Emperors, dictators, communism, socialism, liberal politicians, ACLU
 - Ad infinitum et ad nauseum

A Falling Away Would Come

- Paul warned the Ephesian elders
 - Acts 20:29-30 - “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.”

A Falling Away Would Come

- Paul warned Timothy
 - 1Tim. 4:1-3 - “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 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.”

A Falling Away Would Come

- Peter warned the Christians in Asia Minor
 - 2Peter 2:1-2 - “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.”

A Falling Away Did Come

- It began in the first century
 - 1John 2:18-19 - “Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”
 - Jude 4 - “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A Falling Away Did Come

- 1John 4:1-3 - “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”

A Falling Away Did Come

- Changes in local church organization from autonomous congregations with a plurality of elders overseeing each congregation - Acts 14:23, 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-2
- To a distinction between bishops and elders in which individual bishops had oversight of geographical areas and multiple churches (150 AD)

A Falling Away Did Come

- Other changes were slowly introduced, as traditions of men took precedence over the Word of God
 - Clergy-Laity distinction, borrowed from the OT Jewish priesthood
 - Religious holidays: Easter, Christmas (3rd-4th centuries)
 - Pouring, sprinkling in place of immersion for baptism (251 AD)
 - Church councils where doctrinal matters were decided (325 AD)
 - Creeds, statements of beliefs developed by church councils
 - Instrumental music (5th century)
 - Other doctrines: original sin, infant baptism, penance, premillennialism, veneration of Mary

A Falling Away Did Come

- Appeals to reformation did not work in spite of the efforts of Luther, Calvin, et al, to reform the Roman Catholic church.
 - Their followers simply created a myriad of denominations, keeping some of the human traditions and adding new ones
- Appeals to new revelation have not worked by means of Mormons, Christian Science, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostal churches

A Falling Away Did Come

- The only solution that had a hope of working is restoration
 - Like Ezra and Nehemiah when they restored the Jewish worship after the Babylonian exile - Neh. 8:1-18
 - Like John the Baptist did when he prepared the people for the coming of the Lord - Luke 1:13-17
- But a survey of church history examining the Restoration Movement demonstrates that most of the movement failed, forming new denominations: Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, Independent Christian Churches, progressive churches of Christ, and institutional churches of Christ

The Falling Away Is Still Happening

- There will always be potential for apostasy
 - 1Tim. 1:19-20 - “Having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”
 - 2Peter 2:19-22 - “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. 21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. 22 But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: A dog returns to his own vomit, and, a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

The Falling Away Is Still Happening

- Give heed to warnings
 - Heb. 2:1-3 - “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him”

The Falling Away Is Still Happening

- Heb. 3:12-14 - “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
- Heb. 6:11 - “And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end”

The Falling Away Is Still Happening

- The pull of the world continues to draw many Christians away
 - 2Tim. 4:10 - “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica”
 - 1Tim. 6:9-10 - “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

The Falling Away Is Still Happening

- “I also see the beginnings of Non-Institutional Church of Christ denominational reasoning reflected in the question: ‘Can you help me find an NI Church?’” (Mark Copeland)
- It is “sound” or “faithful.” Use Bible words to describe Bible things.
- Beware brethren, of being numbered among those of the great falling away when the Lord comes again.