

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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The Falling Away

Paul says that before the day of the Lord there must be a falling away.

"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," **II Thessalonians 2:2-3 (NKJV)**

The Greek word for "falling away" in **verse 3** is "*apostasia*". Some English versions translate this word as "falling away", some as "apostasy", and others as "rebellion". Our English word "apostate" comes from the Latin word "apostate" which in turn comes from the Greek word "*apostates*".

The Greek word "*apostasia*" only occurs twice in the New Testament, **II Thess. 2:3 and Acts 21:21**. In the **Acts** passage, it is usually translated "forsake" although some versions render it "apostatize", "apostasy", "abandon", or "give up". However, all these renderings have the same basic idea of 'leaving'.

"But they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to **forsake** Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." **Acts 21:21 (NKJV)**

Vine's Expository Dictionary says of "*apostasia*" - "In papyri documents it is used politically of rebels." (**Number 3**. Under "fall").

The related word "*apostasion*" is found three times in the New Testament, **Matt. 5:31, 19:7, Mark 10:4**. In all three cases it is translated "divorcement", "divorce", or "separation" depending on the English version. The root idea of the word is 'a forsaking, departure, removal from, or withdrawal'.

Our English word "apostate" is specifically used of one who has renounced his religious or political beliefs. However, it is often used in a more general way to include heretics, as well. A heretic has not renounced his faith, but he has unorthodox beliefs. That is, he has not left the faith, but he holds to incorrect beliefs.

Some argue that apostasy requires leaving or renouncing the faith, but rebellion would not require that they were ever in the faith. They point to **II Thessalonians 2:10** to argue that those spoken of here were never in the faith. Thus, they say, "rebellion" is a better translation rather than "apostasy" or "falling away".

"And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because **they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**" **II Thessalonians 2:10 (NKJV)**

There are some things to note in this regard:

First, verse 10 is referring to those who are deceived by the power, signs, and lying wonders of the lawless one. These people may, or may not be, apostate themselves. However, they are deceived by one who is apostate, and thus are never in the faith. It seems like this makes them part of the apostasy as a result.

"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, **with all power, signs, and lying wonders,**" **II Thessalonians 2:9 (NKJV)**

Second, the definition of 'apostasy', as we have seen above, includes those who never held correct beliefs or renounced their faith, but hold to incorrect beliefs. That is, they believe a lie and thus are not saved. This is precisely what is described here.

"10 And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because **they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.** 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, **that they should believe the lie,**" **II Thessalonians 2:10-11 (NKJV)**

Third, it seems to me that apostasy is rebellion. In fact, I'm not sure how one can be apostate without rebelling against God. Refusal to love the truth is rebellion towards God. That is true whether you leave the faith, renounce it, or never have it because of your lack of love for the truth.

Fourth, the man of sin, or lawless one, is clearly both an apostate and a rebel. He sits as God in the temple of God. He opposes and exalts himself over all that is called God or worshipped.

“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.” **II Thessalonians 2:4 (NKJV)**

The temple here is the Church. The man of lawlessness is running a religion that appears to be the Church but is actually worshipping him rather than God. That is an apostate religion by definition. It is also rebellion by definition.

“Do you not know that **you are the temple of God** and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” **II Corinthians 3:16 (NKJV)**

It seems to me that what Paul describes in this passage of **Thessalonians**, is an apostasy, a rebellion, and a falling away. It is all three at the same time. It is a false Christianity that deceives those who do not love the truth. It is a counterfeit Christianity and thus it is heresy, apostasy, rebellion, and a falling away.

This is not the only place where such an apostasy is prophesied. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus that savage wolves would arise even from among them.

“For I know this, that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.**” **Acts 20:29 (NKJV)**

Paul warned Timothy about a departure from the faith and some turning aside to fables.

“1 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.” **I Timothy 3:1-3 (NKJV)**

“3 For the time will come when **they will not endure sound doctrine**, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and **they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.**” **II Timothy 4:3-4 (NKJV)**

John warned of antichrists arising from within the Church itself.

“18 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.” **I John 2:18-19 (NKJV)**

“1 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.**” **I John 4:1-3 (NKJV)**

“For **many deceivers have gone out into the world** who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. **This is a deceiver and an antichrist.**” **II John 7 (NKJV)**

Peter warned about false teachers among them.

“1 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.** 3 By covetousness **they will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.” **II Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV)**

Jude also warned of false teachers or apostates. In fact, Jude has been called “The Acts of the Apostates”.

“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.**” **Jude 4 (NKJV)**

Notice here that the apostasy was already happening when John wrote these epistles. It was also happening when Jude wrote his letter. It was not something that was limited to the time just before the return of Christ. However, it will still be going on when the Lord returns. In fact, the return of the Lord is what will end it.

“14 Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, **the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints**, 15 **to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds** which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”” **Jude 14-15 (NKJV)**

This fits well with Paul’s description of the apostasy and the man of lawlessness who leads it. Neither the apostasy, nor the revelation of the man of lawlessness occurs immediately before the return of the Lord. The mystery of lawlessness was already at work when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, but it would only end with the return of Christ.

“7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” II Thessalonians 2:7-8 (NKJV)

It is a grave mistake to see apostasy as something that only happens shortly before the return of the Lord.

It is equally wrong to believe that apostasy is something that happened in the past but is no longer occurring. It began while the apostles were still alive, and it will continue until the Lord returns.

Church history makes it abundantly clear that the Church has experienced a great apostasy. It began early on and has never stopped. It continues yet today, and it will go on until the Lord returns to end it once and for all.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he described what was already beginning and would continue till the end of this world. Yes, he was writing about the return of Christ and yes, he was writing about the apostasy of the Church that had already started in his time.

Be sure to love the truth lest you be swept away with the apostates.