

## The Falling Away

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed” (2 Thessalonians 2:3)*

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### Introduction

Calvinism holds a powerful sway in current religious thought and practice. It dominates much of the Protestant world. Its poisonous fangs have reached inside some churches of Christ to an alarming degree. Modern preachers en masse and current congregations without calculation have opted for the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion or sanctification or both. Mac Deaver has been a leader among us in contending that the Holy Spirit operates directly on the hearts of saints. He has been a major disappointment to all of us who still teach what he once taught. There was a time when he spoke on the lectures here at 39<sup>th</sup> Street but no more. He has cut himself off from many of the lectureships who delighted to have him speak and write chapters for lectureship volumes. I have been on many lectureships with him. What a tragic loss this has been to the Cause of Christ.

One of the major planks of Calvinism, of which there are five, is the impossibility of falling, backsliding or apostasy. In fact, if Calvinism is true, which it is not, the title of this lecture would be nonsensical. There would be no need to discuss it but only to say that falling away is impossible—case closed! However, Paul declares by Inspiration that there will be a falling away. In fact he affirmed such in the second epistle he wrote, 1 Thessalonians being the initial one of his writing career.

### The Thessalonian Text Stated and Analyzed

Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians while on his second missionary journey. He was at Corinth when he wrote both of these epistles. The second coming of Christ is the keynote in both letters. The keynote of 2 Thessalonians 2 is “falling away.” Paul stated clearly, concisely and forcefully,

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The immediate background of verse 3 is found in verses 1-2,

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Verse 4 depicts in some detail this man of sin, this son of perdition. We read from Paul’s militant pen,

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

The Lord's second coming is discussed in these verses along with his depiction of that certain-to-come apostasy. Of interest we might observe that His second coming is mentioned in all eight chapters of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Early saints in the large Macedonian metropolis were being deceived relative to His second coming. It is no different today. Religious people en masse in our day are very gullible relative to this theme. This is why date-setters have enjoyed heydays of infamous speculation since back in the 1840's. To set a date is a sure way to gain immediate notoriety. Deceivers among the Thessalonians sought to shake the minds of saints. They sought to trouble them by spirit, by spoken words and even by purported letters as from Paul that the second coming was imminent, liable to occur at any given moment. This may have contributed to some of the Thessalonians as they vacated useful occupations and waited in indolence for what they believed was soon-to-occur happening—the Lord's second advent. They were sure it would come and would come immediately. Jerusalem's destruction, as portrayed in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, was still 18 years in the future at the time Paul wrote. That occurred in A.D. 70. Hence, Jesus could not come during the 50's when they were looking for Him or even during the 60's of that first century.

Likewise, it would not occur until there had been a falling away first. Later Paul predicted departures to the Ephesian eldership in Acts 20:29-30 and in the Timothy epistles ( Timothy 4:1ff; 2 Timothy 3:1ff).

Calvinism denies any possibility of an apostasy; there can be no falling away, no departure from the faith. Look at where Calvinism stands in this momentous matter. If this system is true, Jesus Christ can never come period! Paul says He cannot come till subsequent to a falling away. Calvinism declares there can be no falling away, no apostasy. Hence, by Calvinistic premises Christ will never come again! Has Calvinism been so dense the last five centuries that it has not sensed this extreme difficulty in which it has painted itself? Apparently, this never occurred to Calvin nor to any of his religious descendants. As a young preacher I saw this and have referred to it and refuted Calvinism by it for many years in both my preaching and writing.

### **Warnings of Apostasy Abound in Holy Writ**

The late and lamented Guy N. Woods frequently stated that there are more than 2,500 warnings thundered forth in the Bible relative to the possibility of apostasy for God's children. This is a most impressive and awesome number! Infidelic Israelites in the wilderness, all children of God under the Mosaic Dispensation, fell en masse through unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-19). Korah, Abiram, Dathan and a company of rebels died in daring defiance of God and Moses in Numbers 16. Were they saved at death? Ahab was a child of God. Who would affirm he is now in Hadean comforts of Abraham's bosom? The rich man of Luke 16:19-31 did not find himself in comfort with Abraham and Lazarus. Instead he was in torments and had a one-way ticket for eternal Gehenna from final judgment onward. There is no doubt relative to his eternal destiny. He was a son of Abraham and thus a son of God. What shall we say of the Jewish Rabbi who affirmed that Abraham stationed himself at the gates of hell to keep any Israelite from entering? The rich man must have slipped

by Abraham's alert attention and his watchful station! In view of John 8:21, 24, what shall we say of infidelic Jews in our day who die hating Christ and Christianity?

Was Judas, another child of God and former apostle, saved when he died by committing suicide? Peter did not think so in Acts 1:25. He went to his own place and that was not Hadean rest and comfort for a surety. Jesus said it would have been good if that man, Judas, had never been born than to betray the Son of man (Matthew 26:24).

Were the false teachers of 1, 2 Timothy, Titus and Diotrephes in 3 John all bound for heaven when they were shipwrecking the faith of others, overthrowing the faith of their followers and manifesting a fondness for first place? The Bible says NO! Calvinism has to answer affirmatively since all the foregoing were at one time saved.

### **Who Is the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition?**

This is very controversial. The man of sin or the son of perdition did not produce the falling away; the falling away produced him. Some have said it referred to one or more of the Roman Caesars. This cannot be. The man of sin and the son of perdition will be here when Christ comes as per 2 Thessalonians 2:8-9. The Caesars are no more. Some have contended that it refers to a certain individual such as Nero, Mohammed, Napoleon or the like. This cannot be; these men are no more among the living on earth. Some say it references Satan. But Satan produced the falling away and is not a product of the apostasy himself. Some contend it refers to the principle of evil which will increase in intensity and ultimately will produce some highly visionary anti-Christ who will dominate the world near the end of time. This is premillennial fodder but is not a correct exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2.

Here is what I wrote in a short commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians nearly thirty years ago. I still subscribe to every sentiment therein stated:

Many of the finest Bible students of the past see Paul's depiction as finding accurate fulfillment in the development of the Roman Papacy. The great pioneers of the colorful Restoration Movement took this position. Brother Guy N. Woods, one of the ablest Bible scholars since the days of inspiration, has favored this view through the years. It has long been my preferred position on this passage. The great apostasy produced the Roman Catholic church. As long as pagan Rome ruled it was a restraining influence against the development of this system of sin in its fullness. All it could do while pagan Rome ruled was to engage in its developmental stages. Imperial Rome fell in A.D. 476 and by 606 A.D. Roman Catholicism had a man, Boniface III, who regarded himself as the Universal Head of the whole church. The Roman Papacy indeed has set itself above God by claiming the right to add to, subtract from, alter, modify and amend God's laws. In this they have majored. They have been and still are worshipped by their duped patrons. They have allowed and even encouraged others to call them Lord God the Pope. They court more honors than they give God or Christ. Some of the most ungodly men who have ever lived have served as Roman Popes. Every sin in the catalogue of crime has been perpetrated by Roman Popes. They have been seated within a religious framework through the centuries. It would be difficult indeed to find a group of men who come closer to acting like God on earth than these men have done...His (the Pope's)

control reaches into the sacred precincts of marriage and into the very marital bedrooms of husbands and wives. I would not be dogmatic on the point but cannot see how the Roman Papacy can be divorced from Second Thessalonians 2. (Taylor, 97)

Do we have to look any further than all the divine honors paid Pope John Paul II in his death this past spring? Protestants, who should know better, were as bad about this as were the Catholics. Multiplied millions of dollars of free publicity were given them by the media. It was nothing short of idolatrous!

### **Conclusion**

There was a falling away as evidenced by both religious and secular history. To deny apostasy would equal a denial of Romanism's infamous development and continuation.

Let us ever exercise great caution for apostasy is always a present danger unless we remain loyal and steadfast in that doctrine most holy, sound and sensible. The book of Hebrews proves this to be true. Apostasy is always only one generation away.

### **Works Cited**

Taylor, Jr., Robert R. *Studies In First and Second Thessalonians*, (Shreveport, Lambert Publications, 1976)

Note: All quotations are from the KJV unless otherwise stated.