



**Behold  The Lamb**  
**The Great Falling Away**

“Let no man deceive you by any means:  
for that day shall not come, except  
there come a falling away first...”

**II Thessalonians 2:3**

When God called me to preach over fifty years ago, He told me something I could not possibly understand at the time. He instructed me not to study the writings of men or the doctrines of the church, but



Leroy Surface

to seek understanding through prayerful study of the scriptures. He also told me not to teach the *“theology”* of divine healing and miracles, but to *“preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out devils,”* concluding with *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8). Sadly, after several years of fruitful ministry, I took a path that brought me to a place of sin and shame. After godly sorrow had accomplished its work in my heart, God completely restored me on

March 2, 1980. Soon after I began seeking God for the answer for *“the sin problem that is in the heart of man,”* and I found it in the purpose of Jesus Christ when He died on the cross.

The most common comment I hear about this ministry is, *“I’ve never heard this before.”* That is amazing, because we determine to write nothing but what the apostles and prophets have said in the scriptures. The apostle John said, *“These things I write unto you that your joy may be full”* (I John 1:4). To this end we write, knowing that those who receive understanding of the gospel of Christ enter into the rest that Jesus promised, being made *“free from sin”* to serve God in *“righteousness and holiness all the days of their life”* (Luke 1:74-75).

We invite you to visit

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# The “Falling Away”

Message by: Leroy Surface

**II Thessalonians 2:1-3:** *“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. 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.**”*

Some time back I was on the phone with a Christian business lady. After we had finished our business, our conversation turned to the radical changes that are taking place in the world around us, and the signs of the return of Jesus Christ to earth. She asked a question that has been on my mind continually since that day. *“Doesn’t there have to be a falling away first,”* she asked. I answered with the words of the apostle Paul in this scripture, that yes, there will be a great *“falling away.”* What I wanted to say is that we are in the midst of one of the greatest *“fallings away”* in the history of the church. I soon discovered, as I considered what God’s word says about *the “falling away,”* that if I had made such a statement I would not have been entirely correct.

There have been many *“fallings away”* during the almost twenty centuries of church history. The greatest of all, however, and the longest in duration was the church of the dark ages. Before the last of the eyewitness apostles had passed off the scene, false teachers had entered the churches bringing their twisted gospels and leading many astray. By the fourth century A.D., the church of the apostles had *“fallen away”* into the total apostasy of the dark ages. For over twelve hundred years, most of the world was under the dominion of a religious system that ruled in the name of Christianity, and millions of those who dared to believe and teach contrary to the dictates of the Pope and Cardinals were executed for heresy in the most horrible fashion. Perhaps the most common method was to burn them alive.

The Greek word that was translated as “*falling away*” in this text is “*apostasia*,” which means “*defection from truth*.” It should be noticed that it was not those who were found guilty of heresy and burned at the stake who were the apostates. The true “*apostates*” were the high leaders of the church, those who claimed to be the “*defenders of the truth*.” They had fallen so far from the truth into such error that they believed it was God’s will for them to be the judges and executioners of those who dared to disagree with their doctrines. To “*fall away*” so far was an event that did not happen overnight. In fact, it took about three hundred years for the “*persecuted church*” to become the “*persecuting church*.” It’s hard to understand how such a thing could happen to the glorious church which Jesus Christ planted in the world, but it did happen. God Himself questioned the “*falling away*” that came to Jerusalem in the years leading up to their destruction by the armies of Babylon. He asked the question, “***How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers***” (Isaiah 1:21). The question concerning the “*church*” of the dark ages is, “*How did the glorious bride of Christ become a harlot?*” It is true that a very few remained faithful, whom we could rightly define as “*the bride*,” but the public face of the church in that period was that of a harlot.

How did the “*faithful city*” of Jerusalem become a harlot? God gave the answer through the prophet Ezekiel. Speaking of the prophets of Israel, God said, “*They have seen vanity and lying divination, saying, The LORD saith: and the LORD hath not sent them: and they have made others to hope that they would confirm the word*” (Ezekiel 13:6). One “*prophet*” would speak a thing out of his own heart, and another, hoping to share in the “*glory*,” would confirm what the first one said. At this point, both “*prophets*” know that they have not seen or heard anything from God, but they believe the other has. They have become what Jesus called “*blind leaders of the blind*.” He exhorted His chosen disciples, “*Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*” (Matthew 15:14).

**Jeremiah 2:21:** “*Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?*”

The church of the twenty-first century bears no resemblance whatsoever to the church Jesus planted in the world on the Day of Pentecost. In his letter to the believing Gentiles at Ephesus, the apostle Paul describes the “*noble vine*” which Jesus planted. In the first chapter of Paul’s letter he defined the church as “...*His body* (the body of Christ), ***the fullness of Him that filleth all in all***” (Ephesians 1:23). In the last two verses of the second chapter, he identifies the church as “...*an holy temple in the Lord... an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (Ephesians 2:21-22). In every chapter of Ephesians there is another insight into the nature of the church Jesus planted. In the third chapter, it is a church that knows the “*love of Christ, which passeth knowledge,*” and is “***filled with all the fullness of God***” (Ephesians 3:19). In the fourth chapter the church is “...*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Ephesians 4:13). In the fifth chapter, the church is His “*glorious bride*” which He died on the cross to present to Himself, “...*not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:27). It is “...*His body ...His flesh ...His bones*” (Ephesians 5:30), a visible manifestation of who Christ is. Finally, in the sixth and last chapter of Ephesians, the church is the “*triumphant church,*” clothed with the “*whole armor of God*” and “***standing against the wiles of the devil in the evil day***” (Ephesians 6:10-18). We have not seen such a church as Paul describes since the church which Jesus planted on the Day of Pentecost. Near the end of that first generation a “*great falling away*” began as false teachers “*crept in unawares*” (Jude 1:4), bringing with them doctrines which were spawned by Satan himself. Within three hundred years, the glorious church of Jesus Christ had become an “*apostate church.*”

**Isaiah 60:2:** “*For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.*”

After a millennium of the “*gross darkness*” that only false religion can bring, the “*light of truth*” began to shine into the heart of a Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther. In his desperate search for deliverance from his personal prison of religious ignorance, he received six words from God that were destined to deliver millions of people from the bondage of the apostate church. “*The just shall live by faith*” was the message that dealt a deadly wound to the apostate church, which had become one of the heads of the beast described in Revelation 13:1-3. Multitudes of people were delivered from the bondage of religious oppression by those six words. No longer must they confess their sins to a human mediator. No longer would they purchase forgiveness of sins with money. Man could go directly to God through Jesus Christ to receive absolution for sins.

Out of the reformation came the doctrine of “*justification by faith.*” I do not know exactly how Luther preached it, but I know that the modern teaching is not what God said in the scriptures. I heard a world famous preacher explaining justification by faith to his followers. He said, “*The moment a sinner expresses faith in Jesus, God declares them to be ‘not guilty.’ Not only does He declare them to be not guilty, but He also declares that they are ‘innocent,’ and that they are ‘perfect.’ Nothing has changed except the way God sees the person who has believed. They are still a sinner, they will continue to sin, but God will never judge their sins because they ‘believe in Jesus.’*” Consider this teaching for a moment. God, on the basis of “*faith,*” declares “*the guilty*” to be “*not guilty,*” declares “*the guilty*” to be “*innocent,*” and further declares the same guilty person to be “*perfect.*” The preacher that taught this is not to be blamed for the error, however, because what he said is considered to be “*orthodox doctrine*” by most of the churches today. God, however, told Moses that He would “*never do*” what these teachers say He does. Almost fifteen hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God revealed Himself to Moses with these words:

**Exodus 34:6-7:** “*And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for*

*thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and THAT WILL BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation."*

Every child of God should understand that God does not "clear the guilty." He will "forgive" them and "pardon" them if they repent and turn to Him, but He has never, and will never, declare that the "guilty" are "not guilty" while they continue in sin. God has been "merciful, gracious, and longsuffering" from the beginning of time. He has always been a "forgiving God;" He would forgive "iniquity, transgressions, and sin" for those who repented and turned to Him even if Jesus Christ had never died on the cross for us. This in itself lets us know that our salvation is about more than "forgiveness:" it is about "being made free from sin" (Romans 6:22). Jesus suffered the horrible death of the cross, and shed His precious blood, not to "forgive us," but to "cleanse us from all sin" (I John 1:7). There has never been a time that God would not forgive and pardon those who would "forsake their wicked ways" and turn to Him. Isaiah said, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and **he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon**" (Isaiah 55:7). If Calvary were about nothing more than forgiveness and pardon, Christ died in vain. These things did not require the death of the Son of God to accomplish. Christ came into the world to "make an end of sins" (Daniel 9:24), and to "take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

While God is "merciful, gracious, and longsuffering," and "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," He "...will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). The doctrine that tells us that God will "declare the guilty 'not guilty,' 'innocent' and 'perfect'" is called "justification by faith," but it is an erroneous concept of what New Covenant "justification" is all about. Abraham was "justified by faith" when he "believed God," as was every other person in the Old Testament who also "believed God." Each of these "believed God" on the basis of the things God spoke to them. Abraham "believed God" concerning his "seed," which would be "as the stars of heaven

*for number*” (Genesis 15:5-6). Noah “*believed God*” concerning the destruction of all living with the waters of a flood, and “*by faith*” he “*prepared an ark*” (Hebrews 11:7). Able “*believed God*” concerning the sacrifice offering, and “*by faith*” he offered the “*more excellent sacrifice than Cain*” (Hebrews 11:4). All of these “*died in faith, not receiving the promises*” (Hebrews 11:13). Each of them received “*temporal promises,*” but none of them received “*the promise.*” The apostle closes out the eleventh chapter of Hebrews with the words, “*And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: **God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect***” (Hebrews 11:39-40).

Abraham was “*justified by faith*” (Romans 4:3), and so are we (Romans 5:1). Our “*justification,*” however, is the “*better thing*” that God has provided for us. When we “*believe God*” we “*believe the record God gave of His Son*” (I John 5:10). We are “*justified*” through “*faith in His blood*” (Romans 3:25-26), which Paul declares to be “*much more*” than the justification which Abraham received.

**Romans 5:9:** “*Much more then, being now **justified by his blood,** we shall be saved from wrath through him*”

The manner of our “*justification*” is revealed by Paul in the sixth chapter of Romans. God, “*who will not clear the guilty*” justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5, 5:6) through death with Christ on the cross. It must be understood that every person is counted among those who were “*guilty*” and “*ungodly.*” We were all “*sinners*” and “*enemies*” of God. Only those who “*believe the record God gave of His Son* (I John 5:10)” will be “*justified by faith*” through death “*with Christ*” on His cross.

**Romans 6:6-7:** “*Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. **For he that is dead is freed from sin***”

Notice the seventh verse, “*...he that is dead is freed from sin,*” which in itself is a glorious truth. What the apostle actually said, however, is even more glorious. The Greek word that was translated as “*freed*” in this place only, is “*dikaioo,*” which in every other instance is



correctly translated as “*justified.*” This gives the only New Testament definition for justification: “*He who is dead with Christ is justified.*” The salvation of sinners is accomplished through “*death, burial, and resurrection with (in union with) Christ*” (Galatians 2:20). This is the “*grace of God*” to save sinners, and a “*sinner, saved by grace*” is no longer a sinner. He is “*dead, buried, and risen again with Christ.*” “*Old things have passed away and all things are become new*” (II Corinthians 5:17). Oh, how far we have “*fallen away*” from the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There have been several great revivals of truth since the reformation of the sixteenth century, but each of these have been followed by another “*falling away.*” Examples of these were the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the Moravian Brethren, which spawned a prayer meeting that lasted for a hundred years, and the great missionary movement that lasted for two centuries. Their message, which they summarized in the words “*Saving faith brings both holiness and happiness,*” was a great influence upon the doctrine of the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century, which brought to us the truth of “*sanctification by faith.*” We do not question the Lutheran reformation as the first of these revivals. Millions were released from the darkness of religious bondage, only to be quickly “*caught up*” in another “*falling away (apostasy).*” Almost simultaneous with the reformation that was taking place in Germany, something else was happening in Switzerland: John Calvin was developing the “*five points of Calvinism,*” which was not a “*revival of truth,*” but a further “*falling away*” from the truth of the gospel of Christ as preached by the apostles. In its ultimate end, Calvinism has filled the church with sinners, believing that Jesus died to “*take the penalty*” for their sins. “*Penal substitution*” denies the clear message which the apostles of Jesus Christ preached. John said, “***And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not***” (I John 3:5-6). Each of these three statements by John were common knowledge by the first century believers. Who is there among the religious teachers in this twenty-first century that even believe what John said, much less “*knows firsthand*” by their own experience that it is the truth? The “*falling*

away” always brings the people into manmade doctrines of religion, which can only produce a very religious people that find it impossible to “*cease from sin*” (II Peter 2:14). Jesus spoke of such doctrines when He warned His disciples, “*Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness*” (Luke 11:35).

## “Falling Away” Defined

Many people have confused the biblical “*falling away*” with “*backsliding*.” These are most often very sincere people who tend to view the sinful condition of our nation and the entire world in our generation as “*the great falling away*.” The reality is, however, that the sinful condition of our nation is a direct result of the “*falling away*” of the church. If a person is amazed at the sinful condition of the nation, they should examine the “*gospel*” that is currently preached to the nation. If we are “*justified*” and nothing changes, it is logically possible that every person in the nation could be “*saved*” and nothing would change. Our nation is lost because most of the teachers in the churches do not believe the truth that Jesus said will make us free (John 8:32). There is more hope for a backslider, one who has “*fallen into sin*,” than for one who has “*rejected the truth*,” and “*believed a lie*.” The backslider knows he is lost, but those who “*believe the lie*” do not believe they are lost even though they continue in sin. “*...they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” (II Thessalonians 2:11-12).

## The Hebrew “Falling Away”

**Hebrews 6:1-6:** “*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy*

*Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”*

The Epistle to the Hebrews was written, as the title suggests, to those Jews who believed and received Jesus as their Messiah. It was a warning given by the apostle Paul to those who would return from faith in Jesus Christ alone to the works of the Law of Moses. There can be no question whatsoever about the negative attitude of the apostle Paul towards the Law of Moses, even though at one time he had been its most zealous proponent (Philippians 3:6). After his conversion to Jesus, he viewed the Law of Moses as a great detriment that had held him in bondage to sin for as long as he trusted in it (Romans 7:5-6, Philippians 3:8). Paul viewed the Law of Moses as a “curse (Galatians 3:10)” upon the children of Israel which was “added because of transgressions **until the seed should come to whom the promise was made**” (Galatians 3:19), which “seed” is Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). In II Corinthians 3:14 he warned even against reading the Old Testament (Moses’ Law) as a snare that would blind the people to the truth. He continued his warning, “*But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away*” (II Corinthians 3:15-16).

Within three years after his conversion to Jesus, Saul of Tarsus, who had been the great “*persecutor of the church,*” received the greatest revelation of Jesus Christ ever given to man (Galatians 1:11-12). It was this revelation of the gospel of Christ that “*turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:1-6) in that generation. The apostle suffered greatly at the hands of the Jews because of the gospel he preached. He said in II Corinthians 11:24, “*Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one,*” yet there has never been a person that has loved the Jews so much as the apostle Paul. Consider this:

**Romans 9:1-4:** “*I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For **I could wish that myself were***

*accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites....”*

Jesus said, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). What Paul expresses for the Jews goes far beyond the “*greatest love of a man.*” Only Moses approached that same love for the children of Israel when he interceded before God for them at the incident of the “*golden calf:*”

**Exodus 32:31-32:** “*And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.*”

If Moses had been “*blotted out of the book,*” he would have been eternally damned. “*...whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:15). It would be the same if Paul were “*accursed from Christ:*” he would have suffered eternal damnation, which he said he was willing to do if by his “*sacrifice*” God would receive the unbelieving Jews. Of course, such was not possible; God would never punish the innocent to pass over the guilty. He did not at Calvary, and He would not for Paul. If Paul lived and ministered the gospel in this twenty-first century, many would accuse him of being “*anti-Semitist.*” To the contrary, no one loved the Jew so much as Paul, but he refused to bow his knee to the bondage of Judaism.

Now to the definition of “*falling away*” which the apostle Paul gave in Hebrews 6:1-6. In verse one Paul speaks of “*...the foundation of repentance from DEAD WORKS, and of faith toward God.*” In Galatians 4:4, Paul tells us, “*...God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law....*” Again, in Galatians 3:13, he says, “***Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.***” Incredibly, it was the “*Law of Moses*” that condemned Jesus to death and then cursed Him when He died on the cross (**the tree**). Considering this, it is not so incredible that God gave His Son to save sinners from sin and the Jew

from the Law of Moses. As Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15:56, “*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law*” (I Corinthians 15:56).

**Mark 1:14-15:** “*Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*”

In order to receive “*redemption from all iniquity*” (Titus 2:14), we must repent from sin and trust in “*Christ alone*” who died “*alone*” to “*take away our sins*” (I John 3:5). In order for a Jew to receive the same redemption, he must repent from the “*dead works*” of the Law of Moses and place his or her trust in “*Christ alone*,” even as the Gentile must. According to Paul, the foundation for a Jew to be “*saved*” is “*repentance from dead works (the deeds of the law), and faith toward God.*” When Paul said in Romans 3:20, “*Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight,*” he was speaking of keeping the feast days, holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths, as well as offering animal sacrifices and obeying ordinances. These things are what Paul calls “*the deeds of the law,*” which he labeled as “*dead works.*” While it is true that obeying the moral law to perfection, if it were possible, would not make the person “*just*” before God, it is not the moral law that Paul refers to as the “*deeds of the law.*” A “*deed*” is something a person does. The moral law consists of commandments concerning things we “*shall not do.*” The moral law is “*fulfilled (Romans 8:4)*” in everyone who is truly “*born of God,*” because it is the “*Law of God*” which is written in the heart of every child of God (Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10, 10:14-16).

Paul speaks of the “*impossibility*” of restoring those to repentance who have “*fallen away*” from the great reality that is in Christ. This text has been the source of great condemnation to some who have fallen into sin after having once professed faith in Jesus Christ. Without giving the least “*approval*” to those who “*continue in sin*” (Romans 6:1-2), I will tell you, there is a “*way back*” for the backslider; it is through “*godly sorrow*” for sin (II Corinthians 10-11). The warning against “*falling away*” in the sixth chapter of

Hebrews is given specifically to those “*Hebrews (Jews)*” who had believed that Jesus is their Messiah, trusted in Him alone for salvation, received the Holy Ghost, and had “*tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.*” If they shall “*fall away*” from faith in Christ alone into the “*dead works*” of the Law of Moses, from which Christ died to redeem them, and from which they had “*repented*” (Hebrews 6:1), it is “*impossible to renew them again to repentance.*” They have “*crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh.*” They have made Christ “*of none effect*” to themselves; they have “*fallen from grace*” (the covenant of grace: Galatians 5:4), to trust in the deeds of the law. Paul understood the impossibility of bringing these to repentance, because they were not “*backsliders into sin:*” instead, they were “*trusting in the law*” to keep them from sin.

## **The Church at Antioch**

The church at Antioch was perhaps the best of all churches. It was established by the gospel preaching of those Jews who had fled from Jerusalem because of the persecution led by Saul of Tarsus. It was the first among the churches to be made up of both Jews and Gentiles, fulfilling the words of the apostle Paul in the second chapter of Ephesians.

**Ephesians 2:14-18:** “*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one (Jew and Gentile), and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having **abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances**; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And **that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby**: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For **through him we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father.**”*

The church at Antioch became the “*missionary headquarters*” for Paul, Barnabas, and Silas, who were said to have “*turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6)*” in their generation. With the exception of

Peter, who went to the house of Cornelius, the church at Jerusalem had refused to preach the gospel to any but the Jews only (Acts 11:17). It is very worthy of note that Paul, who God sent to the Gentiles, had been saved for seventeen years and had spent fourteen of those years preaching the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles before he received the “*right hand of fellowship*” from the apostles at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). He had been in Jerusalem briefly almost immediately after his conversion, but the disciples send him home to Tarsus because of threats against his life by the Grecians. Within three years, with no input from any of the apostles, Paul (Saul of Tarsus) received the greatest revelation ever given to man; the “*revelation of Jesus Christ,*” which he simply called “*the gospel of Christ.*” He made it clear in his letter to the Galatians that he did not receive the gospel by the teachings of man: “*I certify you, brethren, that **the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ***” (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul began his ministry at Antioch at the invitation of Barnabas, and taught the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles for the space of about a year, at which time the Holy Ghost sent both Paul and Barnabas to preach the gospel to the nations, beginning at Salamis in Cypress. For the next fourteen years, Paul and Barnabas established churches throughout Syria, Greece, and all of Asia. There is no record of any contact with the church at Jerusalem during those years, other than spending fifteen days with Peter at the very beginning of that time period (Galatians 1:15-19). The incident that brought him back to Jerusalem for the first time in fourteen years is given as follows:

**Acts 15:1-2:** “*And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.** When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.*”

The conclusion reached at the conference at Jerusalem was given by James, the head of the Jerusalem church: “*My sentence is, that we*

*trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood”* (Acts 15:19-20). Peter had previously testified at the conference concerning the salvation of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:42-46), saying, “*And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles), **purifying their hearts by faith**. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke (the Law of Moses) upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we **believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we (Jews) shall be saved, even as they (Gentiles)**”* (Acts 15:8-11). This is the wonderful revelation of the gospel that Peter received almost twenty years after the Day of Pentecost: the Jews could be saved *without the Law of Moses* in exactly the same way as a Gentile; “*Christ alone ...grace alone ...faith alone.*”

**Galatians 2:11-14:** “*But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For **before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision**. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, **If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?**”*

After the conference in Jerusalem, Peter went to Antioch to see firsthand the wonderful grace of God that was upon this church, which was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. He had fellowship with Gentiles in their homes and ate with them at their tables, without regard to the prohibitions of the Law and traditions of the Jews against such relationships. The liberty he enjoyed was wonderful to him until the day some Jews of the circumcision came to Antioch. They were



sent by James, who was the head of the Jerusalem church at that time, to check on the conduct, not of the Gentiles, but of the Jews which were in the church. Fear gripped the heart of Peter at the sight of these men because he knew they were of the “*circumcision*.” Even though they professed Jesus to be their Messiah, they were very strict in enforcing the commands and ordinances of the Law of Moses. Even as “*professing believers*,” they could have arrested Peter and brought him back to Jerusalem. Out of fear for his own safety Peter separated from the Gentiles along with the other Jews in the church. In his state of fear and confusion, Peter actually began preaching the Law of Moses to the Gentiles. Thank God for the apostle Paul who was willing to “*stand alone*,” if necessary, for the truth of the gospel! The church of Jesus Christ might have “*fallen away*” and ceased to exist except as a “*sect*” of Judaism if Paul had not stood in defense of the truth of the gospel. He openly rebuked Peter, “***If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?***” Due to the boldness of Paul, the church at Antioch was spared, but it was a different story altogether when the “*Judaizers*” brought their message to the Gentiles at the churches in Galatia.

## A “Falling Away” Among the Gentiles

In the absence of the apostle Paul, many of the Gentiles in the Galatian churches believed the message of the Judaizers and submitted themselves to be circumcised. They had believed the gospel under the preaching of Paul and had received the Holy Ghost, but now they were accepting the message of those who told them they could not be saved unless they were circumcised and kept the Law of Moses. Paul’s response was given in his epistle to the Galatians in terms that many today would believe to be harsh. “*Are ye so foolish?*” he asked. “*Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*” (Galatians 3:3). There is no doubt that Paul referred to their obedience to the Law of Moses as “*the flesh*.” In Philippians 3:4-7 he clearly revealed what “*the flesh*” meant to him: “*If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might **trust in the flesh**, I more: **Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an***

*Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”* These words speak specifically of the “*Law of Moses*” and not of “*The Law of God.*” God’s “*law*” is written in the “*new heart*” of a child of God, but “*The Law of Moses*” which was “*against us* (Deuteronomy 31:24-26)” and “*contrary to us* (Colossians 2:14)” was nailed to the cross with Jesus.

**Galatians 5:1-4:** “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*”

This was the great “*falling away*” among the Gentiles in the churches at Galatia. They did not know they had fallen, however, because they had been convinced by false teachers that God accepted them only through circumcision and keeping the ordinances of Moses. When Paul said, in Hebrews 6:4-6, “*It is impossible...to renew them again unto repentance,*” he spoke from the personal experience of trying to turn them once again to trust in Christ alone. Jesus had wept over the impossibility of reaching Jerusalem; “*How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*” (Matthew 23:37). It is impossible to reach those who believe they are “*more spiritual*” or “*more holy*” than you are. Those same Gentiles, who Paul warned had “*fallen from grace,*” thought they were having a “*great revival*” as increasingly large numbers of people submitted themselves to circumcision, to obey the commands and ordinances of Moses’ law.

Many Christians experience times of doubt and fear brought to them by their adversary, the devil. These are what Peter called the “*trial of your faith*” (I Peter 1:6-7). Those teachers who “*trust in the flesh* (Philippians 3:4-6)” take advantage of those doubts and fears, telling the “*believers*” about “*other things*” they must do to be sure of their

salvation. The purpose of all such things is to move the believer away from faith in “*Christ alone*” to trust in something else. Once the bait is taken, there will always be something more you must do to attain the peace and joy of salvation. In this case, the Judaizers became lords over the salvation of as many as believed them. They became prisoners to every whim of those whom they followed. Those who are deceived by such doctrines never know they have fallen: instead they believe they are becoming more pleasing to God by their struggles to do more religious things, all of which are “*dead works.*” Paul told them clearly, “*Ye are fallen from grace.*” The evidence he gives of this is not that they “*sin.*” it is the “*religious form*” they practice. “*Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain*” (Galatians 4:10-11).

It is important to see that they did not “*fall*” into sin, but into the Law of Moses, yet they were just as “*lost*” as if they had never been saved. Christ had “*become of no effect*” unto them. When Christ becomes of no effect to a person, they have “*fallen from grace.*” The apostle Paul said, “*Sin shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under the law, but under grace*” (Romans 6:14). Those who “*trust in the law*” have “*fallen from grace*” and can no longer keep themselves from sin, because “*the strength of sin is the law*” (1 Corinthians 15:56). Paul tells us in Romans 10:10, “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*” (Romans 10:10). It is not possible for those who “*trust in the law for righteousness*” to also “*believe unto righteousness*” at the same time. “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*” (Ephesians 2:8).

## The Second “Falling Away”

Jude 1:3-4: “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation,*

*ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

A “falling away” by definition can never be a “fall” into sin. The Greek word translated as “falling away (II Thessalonians 2:3)” is “*apostasia*,” which means “defection from truth,” and is derived from the Greek word “*apostasion*,” which speaks specifically of “separation” and “divorce.” Those who “fall away” from the truth always end up in sin, however. When Paul questioned the Gentiles in Galatian, he asked, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect **by the flesh**?” (Galatians 3:3). The “flesh” he spoke of was their human abilities to keep the “deeds” of the Law of Moses. When Paul speaks of “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19) he shows the end result of those who “trust in the flesh” for righteousness. The Galatian experience was that they trusted in the works of the law to make themselves more pleasing to God, but ended up in the most horrible of sins. It is the Corinthian church however that most clearly shows the end result of the second falling away.

Jude said that ungodly men (false teachers) had “*crept in unawares*” who were “*turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.*” It is easy to recognize those who have fallen into this error. You can know them by their “*profession of faith*,” which they seem driven to give without ceasing: “*We are all sinners; we sin every day, but our sins are ‘covered’ by grace.*” Does that sound familiar? It should, because it is the mantra of those in our generation who have believed the lie of “*lascivious grace.*”

## **The “Lascivious Gospel”**

Where did the teaching come from that our sins are forgiven, “*past, present, and future?*” I first heard of it about sixty years ago from a young lady when we were still in high school. She was so worried about a test we were taking the next day that she confided to me, “*I’m so worried about the test. I think I will have to ‘cheat’ to pass it.*” I thought she was joking. I said, “*Don’t you know you will go to hell for ‘cheating’ as fast as you will for stealing?*” She was horrified at the thought. “*No! Not me! I can’t go to hell,*” she blurted out. “*My*

*sins are forgiven.*” She was raised by good parents who faithfully attended a “*Community Church*” with a youth program that reached most of the community. I was raised in an Assembly of God church, which at that time understood that such teaching was a great error. I told her, “*Your past sins were forgiven when you ‘received Jesus’ as your savior.*” She quickly responded, “*All my sins, ‘past, present, and future,’ are forgiven.*” I had never heard, until that moment, of such a doctrine. Neither had I heard, at that time, that I could be “*free from sin*” to serve God in the “*glorious liberty of the children of God*” (Romans 8:21), with a “*new heart*” and a “*new spirit*” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

This “*strange doctrine,*” which I first learned from a teenage girl, has become almost universally accepted in the church of the twenty-first century, and it has obviously taken its toll on both the church and the nation. It was a seed that was “*planted*” by false teachers in the first century church, “*watered*” by the teachings of John Calvin five hundred years ago, and has come into its fullness in this twenty-first century. It is one of two great “*fallings away*” that have done so much to destroy the glorious church of Jesus Christ, which He “*purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28), and “*planted*” on the Day of Pentecost.

Over twenty-five years ago, while I was desperately seeking the answer for the sin that rules in the hearts of the people, the Spirit of the Lord began speaking to me to “*restore the covenant of grace.*” At the time I could not understand what the Lord was telling me. Then He took me to the words of Jude, warning of those who “*turned the grace of God into lasciviousness.*” I heard this question in my heart: “*If the grace of God was turned into lasciviousness in the first century A.D., when was it, in the past nineteen hundred years, restored to the truth?*” The fact is, it has not. The church has meandered between lasciviousness and legalism for almost two millennia, with very few understanding enough of the truth of the gospel to make a difference. The Corinthian church was weak and sinful because it had forsaken the gospel which Paul preached and accepted the doctrines of false teachers and false apostles which came to them with “*another gospel,*

*another Jesus, and another spirit” (II Corinthians 11:3-4). They still taught about “Jesus,” but they did not give “the record that God gave of His Son” (I John 5:10). Their “gospel” was not “the gospel of Christ” which had been revealed to the apostle Paul. The modern church is weak and sinful for the same reasons. Jesus spoke of the coming of the Comforter (the Holy Ghost), saying, “When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: **Of sin, because they believe not on me**” (John 16:8-9). The only reason there remains a “sinner” in the entire world today is “because they believe not on Jesus Christ,” yet the church is full of sinners who profess to “believe in Jesus.” Is this a contradiction? The only “contradiction” is those who “continue in sin” because they have never heard or believed the truth of Christ and what He came into the world to do.*

**I John 5:1:** *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is **born of God.**”*

**I John 5:4:** *For whatsoever (whosoever) is born of God **overcometh the world:** and this is **the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.***

When the apostle speaks of “our faith” as “the victory that overcometh the world,” he speaks about “what we believe about Jesus Christ,” and not “our ability to believe.” The simple definition of faith is “believing what God has said.” Only six verses later, John said, “**He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not THE RECORD THAT GOD GAVE OF HIS SON**” (I John 5:10).

**I John 5:5:** *“Who is he that **overcometh the world,** but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?”*

**Revelation 21:7:** *“**He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.**”*

The bottom line is that a child of God is an “overcomer.” It is an easy thing for sinners to believe the modern day doctrine that says, “If you ‘believe in Jesus’ your sins will be forgiven ‘past, present, and future,’ even before you commit them.” This “doctrine” is the “strong delusion” that God promised to send to those who “do not love the truth.”

**II Thessalonians 2:11-12:** “...because *they received not the love of the truth*, that they might be saved. And *for this cause God shall send them strong delusion*, that they should believe a lie: ***That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, BUT HAD PLEASURE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.***”

## **The Record God Gave of His Son**

People continue in sin because they “do not believe in Jesus” (John 16:8-9). If it was a matter of “will power,” or our “ability to obey laws or principles,” we would all be lost. The children of God are “overcomers,” not because of what they do, but because of “what they believe” about Jesus. The “record” God gave of His Son was given hundreds and even thousands of years before Jesus was born to Mary. The first record is that of the “seed of the woman” who would “bruise the head of the serpent” (Genesis 3:15). Jesus is “the seed of the woman.” Isaiah prophesied, “A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). His name, “Immanuel” means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Did Jesus “bruise the head of the serpent?” The apostle Paul gives the answer; “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; **that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil**” (Hebrews 2:14). John confirms the record in his epistle; “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (I John 3:8).

Over five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, God sent His angel Gabriel to tell Daniel of the coming of one called “*The Messiah* (the Christ), *the Prince*” (Daniel 9:25). His sole purpose in coming is delineated in the previous verse “to finish the transgression, **and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness...**” (Daniel 9:24). Did Jesus “make an end of sins?” The evidence is overwhelming that He did in fact “make an end of sins” in the heart and nature of everyone who believes “the record that God gave of His Son.” It is the apostle John who so clearly confirms the truth; “**And ye know that he was**

*manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not*” (I John 3:5-6).

**I John 5:10:** *“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.”*

The Greek word that was translated “*witness*” means “*evidence given.*” The “*proof*” that a person truly “*believes on the Son of God*” is “*in them;*” it is “*eternal life,*” and John continues to say, “*and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life*” (I John 11-12). We should remember that “*eternal life*” and “*eternal existence*” are two different things. Everyone has “*eternal existence,*” but only those who are “*born of God*” have “*eternal life.*” We should also understand that eternal life can be seen in everyone who has it. In the second verse of his epistle John defines eternal life in a parenthesis; “*(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*” (I John 1:2). Eternal life can be seen, because it is “*life.*”

Jesus said, “*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” The “*record that God gave of His Son*” is the “*truth*” that Jesus said will “*make you free.*” Everything God said He would do, Jesus did through His death on the cross. He “*bruised the head of the serpent;*” He “*destroyed the works of the devil;*” He “*destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*” Jesus is “*The Lamb of God*” who was offered to “*take away the sin of the world,*” (John 1:29) which is the same “*sin*” that entered into the world through the first man, Adam (Romans 5:12). “*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous*” (Romans 5:19).

Please notice that the things I have written are not the doctrine of any earthly organization, but are the words of the apostles, the prophets, and of Jesus Himself. It is only a small part of “*the record that God gave of His Son.*” It is “*the simplicity of Christ*” that Paul contended for (II Corinthians 11:3), and “*the truth*” that Jesus said will “*make you free*” if you will believe it and “*trust in Him*” to do it.



## The Fallen Church

The church of the twenty-first century is not *“falling”* because it has already *“fallen.”* Millions of people around the world are following a false teacher who seems to be the fountainhead of *“lascivious grace”* in this twenty-first century. He is very knowledgeable and smooth in his delivery. I am impressed with his knowledge of the scriptures and his ability to teach from them. His power to *“deceive, if possible, the very elect (Matthew 24:24)”* is the greatest I have ever seen. When you cut through all the wonderful sounding rhetoric, his message can be summarized to say: *“Sin doesn’t matter, because you are not under the law, but under grace. All your sins have been forgiven, past, present, and future, even before you commit them. If you believe this, there is no reason to repent when you do sin, because to repent is to sin the sin of unbelief, not believing you have already been forgiven.”* Millions of people who have never known the reality of the *“new birth”* are flocking to this doctrine. It has great appeal as a doctrine of *“freedom,”* which the gospel of Christ is, but instead of *“being made free from sin”* (Romans 6:7, 18, 22) as the scripture says, it speaks of freedom to *“continue in sin, that grace may abound”* (Romans 6:1-2). It offers *“freedom”* from the penalty of sin ...from the guilt ...and from the shame that sin brings; all because of a basic belief that *“sin doesn’t matter.”* Jesus commanded his disciples to *“preach the gospel.”* Those who believed would be saved, but those who refused the gospel would be damned. The nature of the gospel of Christ is not to *“damn”* but to *“save.”* It is the nature of sin to damn everyone in whom it dwells (Romans 7:20-24). The power of the gospel of Christ to save a soul (Romans 1:16) is its power to *“take away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). The *“sin of the world”* is *“the sin”* that entered into the heart of every person through the disobedience of the *“first man,”* Adam, and is *“taken away”* by the obedience of the *“second man,”* which is Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Romans 5:19). It is His *“obedience unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8) that has taken sin out of the heart and nature of *“whosoever believeth.”* Simply *“believe”* to *“receive.”*

The idea that a person has “*fallen*” indicates that the person had occupied a higher place from which they “*fell*.” When Paul speaks of the impossibility of renewing to repentance those who have “*fallen away*,” he shows the great “*height*” from which they fell. They were “*once enlightened*,” they had “*tasted the heavenly gift*,” they were “*made partakers of the Holy Ghost*,” they had “*tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come*” (Hebrews 6:4-5). These things speak of the reality of “*sitting together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus*” (Ephesians 2:6). Such a place is the “*confession*” of a few in the modern church, but it was the experience of the church of the first generation. The church fell away from that great height through the message of false teachers and false apostles that entered in with the doctrine of lascivious grace, and has never been completely restored in any generation since. The reformation, the sanctified revival, the Pentecostal revival, all these were restorations of truth, one laid upon the other, with each greater than the previous. Luther restored the knowledge of “*justification by faith*,” The Moravians and the Wesley brothers restored the knowledge of sanctification by faith; and in the Pentecostal revival, God “*poured His Spirit*” upon those who were sanctified. The outpouring of the Holy Ghost of the twentieth century began with at least two different sanctified groups almost a decade before the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. One was in Topeka Kansas on January 1, 1901, and the other was in the mountains of North Carolina shortly before that time. The revival had spread to four continents before it came to Azusa Street, and in every case it was upon those who were sanctified by grace through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. During the first half of the twentieth century the Pentecostal revival was known for the most incredible manifestations of God’s healing and deliverance power imaginable. Both men and women of God were literally “*clothed with miracles*,” which was the promise Jesus gave in Luke 24:49. By the end of the 1950’s, however, the miracle power of God was waning, and a “*falling away*” from the reality of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost had begun. The 1960’s were marked by charlatans, who used what Paul called “*sleight of men, and cunning craftiness*” to deceive the people. I was a young minister of twenty-five years of

age when I heard the first prophetic words of many I would receive from God. In June of 1965 I was at a wedding in a Catholic church. While waiting for the ceremony to begin, I looked with interest at the images of the saints around the walls and the pictures of the Stations of the Cross above them. As a young Pentecostal preacher, I was feeling indignant at what I perceived to be the ignorance of the people who worshiped these things, when I heard the voice of God speak clearly in my heart; *“In the last days, a harlot will arise out of Pentecost more vile than the Roman Catholic church of the dark ages.”* I was shocked at what I heard, but I could not deny that I heard it. Four years later, in July of 1969, I received one of many prophetic visions from the Lord. I saw a false spirit come to the churches, pretending to be the Holy Ghost, and many of the churches received it as the Holy Ghost. The way I recognized that the spirit was false was that those who received it began to exalt themselves rather than Jesus Christ. As I came out of the Spirit, I heard a voice from heaven saying, *“Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and is become **the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.**”* The unclean spirit I had seen in the vision came upon the church in the form of an unclean bird. This was in the very earliest days of what became the *“Charismatic”* movement which swept around the world in a very few years, and was thought to be the *“greatest outpouring of the Spirit ever,”* but it was not. It was much larger than the Pentecostal revival, but it was different in that the *“spirit”* was given to very unholy people. In fact, for the first time, people began *“learning how”* to speak in tongues, to prophesy, and to do all sorts of things that only the Holy Ghost could do in the Pentecostal revival. In both the *“sanctified”* and the *“Pentecostal”* revivals, entire nations were shaken by what God was doing, and cultures were changed for the better. During the years of the Charismatic revival, we lost America and Western Europe to the secularists. The antichrist spirit that rules the nations today is a direct result of a *“church”* that has fallen from the reality she once knew.

**II Thessalonians 2:8-12:** *“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: **Even him, whose coming***

*is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness IN THEM THAT PERISH; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause GOD SHALL SEND THEM STRONG DELUSION, THAT THEY SHOULD BELIEVE A LIE: That they all might be damned who BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, BUT HAD PLEASURE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.*”

There are several things in these verses which I will point out concerning the antichrist spirit that has found a place to work among the children of God. First, *“that Wicked”* which is to be revealed in these last days has been *“working”* since before Paul wrote this warning: *“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work”* (II Thessalonians 2:7). The antichrist spirit has worked for almost two thousand years through false teachers and false prophets, but in these *“last days”* it will be *“revealed”* for what it is. Second, notice that the *“working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”* is *“in them that perish.”* The reason they perish, however, is of utmost importance; *“they perish”* because they *“received not the love of the truth that they might be saved.”* When a person who professes to *“believe”* does not *“receive the love of the truth,”* it is God, according to the apostle Paul, who sends to them a *“strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, and be damned.”* Finally, in these few verses, the apostle closes by explaining why they do not love and believe the truth: *“their pleasure is in unrighteousness.”*

**II Thessalonians 2:9-10:** *“...the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness IN THEM THAT PERISH....”*

Satan is *“the great pretender.”* His great ambition that brought his downfall was not to be a devil, but to be *“like the most high”* (Isaiah 14:12-14). The prophet Elijah had the power to *“call down fire from heaven”* (II Kings 1:10). In the last days it is the second beast of Revelation 13:13-14 that has power to call fire down from heaven. *“And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had*

**power to do in the sight of the beast.**” Please understand that this is not speaking of a single mortal man, but of the “*working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders in them that perish.*” It is the last day manifestation of the spirit of antichrist, “*whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*” (II Thessalonians 2:8).

**Matthew 24:21-26:** “*For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*”

In these six verses we find everything Jesus said about the time of “*great tribulation.*” There are two identifying marks He gave of that time that we should take note of. The first is the greatest slaughter of men that has ever been. Revelation 9:15 tells us that one third of mankind will be slain worldwide. Zechariah 13:8 says that in all the land of Israel two thirds will be “*cut off and die.*” Jesus said, “*Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.*”

The second “*identifying mark*” of the time of great tribulation is the “*false Christs and false prophets*” which will arise, showing “*great signs and wonders*” to “*deceive the very elect.*” Isn’t it amazing that Jesus placed more emphasis on the message and works of false prophets than on the locust armies that will be bringing slaughter and devastation to the entire world? Can we comprehend that false teachers and false prophets in the church are more dangerous than ISIS will ever be. One can kill the body, and can do no more, but the other will destroy the souls of those who trust in them.

**Revelation 2:5:** *“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”*

Certainly the visible church in this generation is a *“fallen church”* when compared with the *“glorious church”* which Jesus *“purchased with His own blood”* and *“planted”* in the world on the day of Pentecost. It is not this present generation that fell, however, from the *“heavenly places in Christ Jesus”* which is the dwelling place of the redeemed. This fallen generation is the result of what has been taught by the traditions of men from generation to generation dating back to those who *“fell away”* from the truth centuries ago. Jesus warned of a generation much like ours, saying, *“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matthew 15:9).

Those who profess, *“We are all sinners; we sin every day,”* are those who are *“taken captive by him (the devil) at his will”* (II Timothy 2:25-26). Paul said they can *“recover themselves from the snare of the devil”* if they will *“acknowledge the truth.”* As long as they hold to the doctrines of false teachers, they have no choice but to *“continue in sin.”* The apostle Paul labeled the doctrines of false teachers as *“profane and vain babblings”* which can only *“increase unto more ungodliness”* (II Timothy 2:16). If you are one who is held in bondage to sin by the *“gospel”* you believe, *“change your mind”* and *“believe the truth.”* Jesus said *“the truth shall make you free”* from sin (John 8:32-34). The generation that *“falls away”* from truth in doctrine and experience cannot be renewed to repentance, but for many in this generation there is repentance and restoration if they will hear the truth and trust in Christ who came into this world to save sinners and make an end of sins.

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