

The Falling Away

The Apostate Church of the Last Days

By Pastor Art Watkins

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 Paul wrote these words:

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;

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.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

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.

According to these verses someone had the Thessalonians "*all shook up*" (verse 2) concerning the second coming of Christ for the church. Someone led them to believe he was about to come back. (Sound familiar?) Paul wrote these words to show them Christ's coming was not at hand as they were led to believe. He said Christ's coming is preceded by a number of events he lists in these verses and until these events take place no one can say his coming is at hand.

One of the events Paul said will precede the coming of Christ for the church is a ***falling away***. He wrote: **Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.**

The falling away must first come before Christ comes again. The falling away precedes the coming of Christ. The falling away is the first of a number of events that precede the coming of Christ.

The Greek word for falling away is ***apostasia***. It does not take a rocket scientist to see that our English word ***apostasy*** comes from this word. What God has shown us in this chapter is that before Christ comes again to gather together the church unto himself, there must first be a major apostasy. His coming is preceded by a major apostasy. This is why Paul said his coming ***is not at hand***. He will not come until after this apostasy is fully developed.

He also calls the falling away the *mystery of iniquity* and he says it will continue to work and work till Christ comes and it will also prepare the way for the coming of the antichrist. Here is a thought: If it prepares the way for the coming of the antichrist then it must have something in common with him. You will see what it is as you read this article.

The question is: What does this apostasy look like? How does the Bible describe it? When it gets here what will it look and sound like? We need to know what it looks like ahead of time so that when it comes we can say there it is and warn people to stay away from it.

There is more than one description of this apostasy in the New Testament and it would take a large book to comment on all the verses. We will confine our study to Paul's description of it mainly in 2 Timothy 3 and a few other verses.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-9 Paul wrote these words:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all *men*, as theirs also was.

In the context Paul is describing the last days that precede the coming of Christ just like 2 Thessalonians 2. The context is the same. In these verses there is a group of men God has singled out for us to pay special attention to. Once you see who they are, it will help us to see what the falling away and apostasy of 2 Thessalonians 2 will look like when it comes because these verses describe the apostasy of 2 Thessalonians 2.

In verse 5 he warns us about men who have a ***form of godliness***. The Greek word for the English word “form” is spelled *morphosin*. We get our word metamorphous from it. It is something that changes from one form and appearance into another; such as a caterpillar is changed and transformed into a butterfly. Prior to becoming a butterfly he is a caterpillar. Looking at a butterfly you would never guess he was once a caterpillar. These men have a form of godliness; They appear to be godly men which means they are religious men. This is a warning about men who appear to be religious and godly, but they are not. Why? Because they ***deny the power of godliness***. What is the power of godliness? The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom.1:16) and the power of godliness. Therefore, these men deny the true gospel. But people are fooled by them because they have a form and an appearance of godliness. They morph themselves. They change their outward appearance. Outwardly they look and sound like the real thing, but that is just a masquerade designed to fool you, because inwardly these men are satanic.

They are just like the men God warned us about in 2 Corinthians 11.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 Paul wrote: ***But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye***

receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

In these verses Paul warned the Corinthians and us about men who preached a Jesus, a gospel and a spirit that he did not preach. In verses 13-15 he identifies these men:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

The men who preached the other Jesus, gospel and spirit were ministers of Satan who masqueraded themselves as ministers of righteousness. They are just like the men Paul warned us about in 2 Timothy 3:5 who have a form or appearance of godliness.

They have a form of godliness because they preach a Jesus, a gospel and a spirit. But it's a front and a charade because their Jesus and gospel and spirit are counterfeits. This concerned Paul because he knew that most people judge men by the outward appearance and this is why he gave a full description of these men in his chapter so that we can identify them.

The men who have a form of godliness are:

Verse 2

Lovers of themselves

They are men who preach and promote self love, self esteem, self promotion, self improvement, self enrichment, self awareness, and self advancement. This is why they are so popular.

Covetous

What do men covet the most? Money. These men covet and lust after money. That is what they preach about, talk about and promise to covetous people like them. (See 2 Peter 2:3,15)

Boasters, proud

Many of these men claim to be little gods. One even calls himself a little messiah.

Blasphemers

What can be more blasphemous than to preach a counterfeit Jesus, gospel and spirit and claim they are real?

Verse 3

Without natural affection

Some of these men are sodomites. They are religious, they have a form and appearance of godliness, but they are sodomites. (See Jude 1:7-8)

Incontinent

This is someone who is given over to sexual sins and sexual pervasions of all types. They are religious, but many of them are sexual perverts. (2 Peter 2:14) (Sound familiar?)

Fierce

If you oppose them they will persecute and even kill you. The false apostles and prophets of 2 Corinthians 11 persecuted Paul, Christ and all the apostles. The men who have a false form of godliness are a part of the satanic religious system of this world that John calls the great whore in Revelation 17. When John saw her he said she is: ***Drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*** (Rev.17:6)

Verse 4

They are traitors

They are traitors of the Lord (2 Peter 2:1, Jude 1:4) and of true believers. (Luke 21:16)

Highminded

They place themselves on the same level as the apostles and prophets.

They love pleasure more than God

The thing that gives men the most pleasure today is sex, money, wealth and power.

Verse 6

They creep into houses

Even though this applies to ordinary houses and homes of people it also applies to local churches for every local church in the Bible met in some one's home. (See Romans 16:5)

The word *creep* means: To move secretly; to move so as to escape detection, or prevent suspicion. In other words these men creep into houses and churches undetected. That is why no one knows who they really are. Why? They have a form of godliness. They use the appearance

of godliness to creep into houses and churches without being detected. They are wolves but they appear as sheep.

Here is what Jude said about them; ***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.*** Jude 1:4

Here is what Titus said about them: ***For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*** Titus 1:10

They lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lust

The favorite target of these men is women. The first person the devil deceived in the Bible was a woman. It was the woman who was deceived by Satan and not the man according to 1 Timothy 1:14. This is why God calls the woman the weaker vessel in 1 Peter 3:7. Weaker in the sense of being easier to deceive. Why? Because most women judge men by their outward appearance. But the women they target the most are *silly women who are laden down with sin and led away with diver's lusts*. This shows us their main target is either lost women or carnal women who are easily led away from the truth by lust. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4 Paul wrote: ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.***

When silly women are led away of their own lusts they turn from sound doctrine and seek out teachers who will tickle their ears with fables.

Verse 7

They are ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth

This is true of the both the women and the men who teach them. Outwardly they appear to be searching for truth, but they never find it. Why? Because you are not going to learn truth from men who are reprobates, blasphemers and corrupt concerning the truth. (Verse 8) What can you expect to learn from blasphemers who preach a false gospel, a false Jesus, and a false spirit? Nothing but lies and false doctrine. You want find gold in garbage

cans and you will not find truth listening to false teachers and giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.

Verse 8

Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith

This is a major clue as to who these men are and what church you will find them in and what religious system they represent. These men who have a form or appearance of godliness and religion are **AS** the two men who withstood Moses and resisted the truth. Once we see how Janes and Jambres withstood Moses, we will see who these men are. When we see who they are we will get a clearer picture of what the falling away of 2 Thessalonians 2 will look like.

How did these two men withstand Moses and resist the truth?

In Exodus 7-8 God sent Moses to command Pharaoh to let Israel leave Egypt and warned him that if he didn't he would smite Egypt with miraculous plagues, but notice what happened.

In Exodus 7:10-12 it says: ***And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.***

In Exodus 7:20-22 it says: ***And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.***

In Exodus 8:6-7 it says: ***And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.***

Do you see how these men withstood Moses and resisted the truth? They withstood Moses and the truth by working signs, wonders, and miracles!

Let's put all the pieces of the puzzle together and get the big picture.

In 2 Timothy 3 God described the last days that precede the coming of Christ. These verses give us a picture of the future before it happens for only God knows the future. He said the last days will be perilous times, meaning days of danger, deception, tribulation, and trials. In these verses he has put the spot light upon a particular group of men to beware of. He gives us a detailed description of them.

*He says they have a form or appearance of godliness, but it is not real for it is counterfeit. They have an appearance of godliness, but they are in fact ministers of Satan like those in 2 Corinthians 11 who preach a false Jesus, a false gospel and a false spirit.

*He said these men are high minded, proud and boasters because they place themselves equal to the apostles and prophets of the Bible.

*He said they are traitors; they will deny the Lord and his people to save their own skin and to make a dollar.

*He said these men who have a form of godliness are lovers of themselves. In other words they promote themselves and exalt themselves above everyone else. They place themselves on a higher level of spirituality than everyone else. They claim to be THE ANOINTED ONES.

*He said these men who have a form of godliness are covetous for money which he calls filthy lucre. They are motivated by their lust for money. Money is their goal and their god.

*He said these men who have a form of godliness are blasphemers. Why? Because they preach a false Jesus, a false gospel and a false spirit and claim they are of God. They are the ultimate blasphemers.

*He said many of these men who have a form of godliness are without natural affection, meaning many of them are sodomites.

*He said these men who have this phony appearance of godliness, love the pleasures of this world which are sex, money, wealth and riches and power.

*He said these men who put on a masquerade of religion are incontinent, meaning they are given over to all types of sexual sins and perversions. (Sound familiar?)

*He said these men who appear as sheep are in reality fierce meaning that if you oppose them they will persecute you and kill you. One of them said that he wished God would give him a machine gun to kill all those who oppose him. Another prayed God would kill all those who exposed him. *

*He said these men who have this false front of piety creep into houses and churches, but most people are unaware of who they really are for they appear as godly men or sheep and not as the wolves they really are.

*He said in the houses and churches they creep into their favorite target is women and *most of their followers are women*, especially women who are laden with sins and led away by carnal lusts.

*He said they and those who follow them are ever learning, but they never come into the knowledge of the truth, because they are reprobate concerning the truth and are blasphemers.

*He said these men who have a form of godliness are as Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses. This means these men who have a form of godliness: who preach a false Jesus, a false gospel and a false spirit will work counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles to deceive the hearts of their followers.

If you put all these parts to the puzzle together what does the big picture look like? What religious system does this look like? Where do you find men like this today? What churches do you find them in? It obvious he has described the modern day charismatic movement 2000 years before it showed up. This is a perfect picture of the charismatic movement and its preachers.

**The modern day charismatic movement is the falling away of 2
Thessalonians 2:3.**

Lest you doubt this is true, take a look at these verses:

In Matthew 24:22-24 Jesus said: ***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.***

The context here is the same as 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Thessalonians 2. It's the last days that precede the second coming of Christ. The men God warned us about in 2 Timothy 3 are the same men found in verse 24 which says: ***For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders.***

Again we find a prophecy of a group of men who will work signs and wonders to deceive people before Christ comes. The religious system that promotes signs and wonders and miracles today more than any other is the charismatic religious movement. And that movement deceives people just like these men. How? By the counterfeit Jesus, gospel and spirit they preach and by their counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles. (Notice they also deceive people about the time and place of the second coming of Christ just as Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.)

Look at these verses:

In Revelation 13:11-15 John wrote: ***And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 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; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.***

Again the context is the same as in 2 Timothy 3, 2 Thessalonians 2 and Matthew 24. It's the last days that precede the coming of Christ.

In those days a man will show up working signs, wonders and miracles and they will be so powerful and convincing that the whole world will worship the antichrist except those whose names are in the book of life. (Verse 8)

Do you know of a religious system that says they work signs and wonders and miracles and their miracles cause their followers to worship a false Jesus and believe a false gospel and receive a false spirit?

Look at these verses:

Revelation 16:13-14 says: ***And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.***

Notice these men will work miracles so strong and convincing it will cause all the kings and nations of the earth to fight for the antichrist against Jesus Christ at the battle of Armageddon.

The last days will witness 1000's of men and women who will all claim to be men and women of God working signs, wonders and miracles. You just read about them in 2 Timothy 3, Matthew 24, Revelation 13 and 16. But they are counterfeits that will actually prepare the world for the coming of the antichrist who is ultimate miracle worker.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul says that the falling away which he calls the mystery of iniquity will work and work and work and then the antichrist will come. The apostasy will become so strong that by the time the antichrist comes the world will be conditioned to believe he is the true Christ. And when he comes it says his: ***Coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.***

As mentioned in the beginning of this article; If the falling away prepares the way for the coming of the antichrist then it must have something in common with him. It does; they both deceive the world by counterfeit signs, wonders and miracles.

No one can deny the religious movement that emphasizes and promotes and preaches signs, wonders and miracles the most today is the charismatic movement. It is a worldwide movement that appeals to all religions of all nations by its counterfeit signs and wonders. This should convince us the falling away and apostasy God warned us about is the modern day charismatic movement. It is the religious movement that is doing more than any other to prepare the way for the ultimate charismatic, the antichrist himself!

There is something else about the charismatic movement that makes it even more dangerous and it's how it attracts all denominations. It is very ecumenical. It is like a magnet; it attracts every type of denomination, Catholic, Protestant, Independent, and even the cults because many of its practices are from the occult. These denominations are all heavily influenced by the signs and wonders of the charismatics. If this religious system was Catholic, the Protestants would not be attracted to it. If it was Protestant or Baptist the Catholics would not be attracted to it. But they are all attracted to the charismatic movement. It is the one movement that is appealing to all denominations. Baptists are not becoming Catholics and Catholics are not becoming Baptists. But Baptists and Catholics are both becoming charismatics.

The satanic religion of the last days will be charismatic and will help usher in the antichrist who is the ultimate charismatic. When he shows up people who are influenced to believe anything that has signs and wonders attached to it will welcome the antichrist with open arms. They will believe he is the true Jesus.

How can we be saved from the falling away?

1Timothy 4:1 says: ***Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;***

1Timothy 4:16 says: ***Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.***

In verse 1 he warns us about the coming apostasy and in verse 16 he shows us how to be saved from it. The salvation in verse 16 is from the coming apostasy in verse 1. We can be saved from it by continuing in sound doctrine. Only sound doctrine will save us from the apostasy of the last days.

But we also see in verse 1 that many will be overcome by the apostasy and depart from the faith. WHY?

Here is why: 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says: ***For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.***

Do you see why so many will be swept away by the falling away? It's because they will **NO LONGER ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE**. Instead they will seek after teachers who will tickle their ears with fables.

The gospel is the only message that can save sinners from their sins. Sound doctrine is the only saviour that can save Christians from the falling away and apostasy of the last days. The deception of the last days will be so strong that if you do not continue in sound doctrine you will depart from the faith. You will end up a casualty and a POW of the falling away. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

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* Concerning his critics, Benny Hinn says: "You know, I've looked for one verse in the Bible -- I just can't seem to find it -- one verse that says, 'If you don't like'em, kill'em.'" I really wish I could find it! Sometimes I wish God would give me a Holy Ghost machine gun. I'd blow your heads off.

Paul Crouch said: I think they [i.e., those he labels 'heretic hunters'] are damned and on their way to hell and I don't think there is any redemption for them. I say, 'To hell with you.' I say, 'Get out of God's way, quit blocking God's bridges or God is going to shoot you if I don't'" (Paul Crouch on TBN's "Praise-A-Thon," April 2, 1991).

**Concerning women; a prominent Pentecostal preacher once said that the majority of Pentecostals and Charismatics are women and if they ever left the movement it would go out of business.