

A COMING APOSTASY (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3)

I. A falling away would come.

- A. Paul warned the Ephesian elders about this.
 - 1. It would occur after Paul's departure (Acts 20:29).
 - 2. It would be caused by sinful men within the church and even within that eldership, as well as forces from outside the church (Acts 20:29-30).
- B. Paul warned Timothy about it.
 - 1. Paul told Timothy that in later times there would be those that fell away (1 Timothy 4:1-2).
 - 2. He even gave Timothy some examples of the doctrines they would teach (1 Timothy 4:3).
 - 3. In his final epistle, Paul warned Timothy again about the coming apostasy (2 Timothy 4:3-4).
- C. Peter warned the brethren in Asia Minor about it.
 - 1. Peter plainly told them that there would be false teachers (2 Peter 2:1).
 - 2. Sadly, he told them that many would follow the false teaching they heard (2 Peter 2:2).
- D. The Lord Himself prophesied that false Christ's would arise seeking to take away Christians (Matthew 24:24).

II. A falling away did come.

- A. This falling away began in the first century.
 - 1. John described it in his epistle.
 - a. He told of "antichrists" who had gone out from the church (1 John 2:18-19).
 - b. He warned of "false prophets" who were already in the world (1 John 4:1-3).
 - c. These people were teaching false doctrines about the nature of Jesus.
 - 2. Jude described it in his epistle.
 - a. Certain men had crept in unnoticed (Jude 4).
 - b. These were ungodly men who turned the grace of God into lewdness (Jude 4).
 - c. The way they did this was by denying the authority of Jesus.
 - 3. Paul told the Thessalonians that it was already beginning when he wrote to them, which was around 48-50 AD (2 Thessalonians 2:7).
- B. This falling away continued in the following centuries.
 - 1. One of the first changes that took place involved the organization of the local congregation.

- a. God intended that local congregations be autonomous, being governed by Christ as their heads, and a plurality of elders in each congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-2).
 - b. What came about was a distinction between one bishop and the rest of the eldership.
 - c. This one bishop came to rule over a congregation, and eventually, over cities and areas.
2. Other changes were slowly introduced as traditions of men replaced God's word.
 - a. There arose a clergy-laity distinction.
 - b. Religious holidays began to be observed, first Easter and later Christmas.
 - c. Pouring and sprinkling in place of immersion (251 AD).
 - d. Church councils meeting to decide doctrinal matters (325 AD).
 - e. Creeds and statements developing from the councils.
 - f. Instrumental music (first used in the 400's).
 - g. Other doctrines, such as original sin, the elevation of Mary, infant baptism and others came as a result of this falling away.
- C. It remains in the present centuries.
1. Appeals of reformation did not work.
 - a. The Roman Catholic Church was not reformed despite the efforts of Luther, Zwingli and others.
 - b. Sadly, it lead to further division and the introduction of denominationalism.
 2. Appeals to new "revelations" have not worked either.
 - a. Several have appealed to "modern day revelations" they said they received from God.
 - b. All these did was lead to more confusion and new religious bodies such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists and others.
 3. The only solution that will work is that of "restoration."
 - a. This is what Josiah did (2 Kings 23:1-3).
 - b. As Ezra and Nehemiah did (Nehemiah 8:1-18).
 - c. Like John did when he prepared the people for the coming of Jesus (Luke 1:13-17).
 4. What these all did was to restore the hearts of the people back to God's Word.
 - a. Following God's word only is the only way to avoid apostasy (Hebrews 2:1-4).

- b. Restoring our hearts back to God's word is the only way to return from apostasy.
 - D. A survey of church history bears out that a falling away did take place just as the Lord and His apostles prophesied.
 - III. **A falling away can still come.**
 - A. Apostasy is always possible.
 - 1. The New Testament is filled with warnings against falling away.
 - a. They are not just about a general apostasy as in our text.
 - b. Individuals can apostatize (1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Peter 2:19-22).
 - 2. Therefore, we must heed these warnings.
 - a. We must give more attention (Hebrews 2:1-3).
 - b. So we don't develop unbelief (Hebrews 3:12).
 - c. So we don't get hardened by sin (Hebrews 3:13).
 - B. It has happened before.
 - 1. Catholicism is a result of it as well as denominationalism.
 - 2. Even the restoration movement of the 1800's had large numbers apostatize to form the Christian Church.
 - C. It is happening now.
 - 1. There are those in our brotherhood who would lead us right into denominationalism.
 - 2. There are many Christians who, individually, allow themselves to be swept up by the cares of the world (Luke 8:14).

From a sermon by Mark Copeland