

The Falling Away

Introduction

I have always held that, at the end, the people of God will reach completion. Not just in the sense that every elect person is born into the world and saved, but that there is a fulness of testimony in the world even at the end.

In the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt 13:24ff), Jesus explained that the wheat is allowed to come to fulness and be harvested along with the tares, which then become visible and can be separated out more easily than earlier in the growing season.

The wheat (i.e. the elect) is not shrivelled husk at the time of harvest but the crop is fully mature and evident. This means that, even at the end, the church may well be persecuted to death and hidden from view, but will still be a vibrant spiritual force in the Earth away from the eyes of men.

This understanding of a hidden mature testimony at the end has to be balanced with the teaching of a great falling away. Even Jesus questioned the church's final testimony, 'Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?' (Lk 18:8).

Here I want to investigate this falling away and try to understand its implications. They are serious.

Key texts: 2 Thess 2

1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,

2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

9 The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Apostasy

‘Falling away’ is the Greek word *apostasia* meaning: falling away, defection, apostasy. The falling away is a defection and apostasy.

Now apostasy can only affect the visible church. Sinners outside the church have already fallen away and missed the mark; they are not in view here. The apostasy affects the visible church.

Apostasy cannot affect the genuine invisible church, the elect, because one of the doctrines of grace is perseverance. Those who are truly regenerated and converted will be brought to the consummation of salvation and will not fall away. The apostasy of true saints is an Arminian doctrine and is false. Regenerated people have eternal security.

However, the church is not filled with genuine believers. From earliest times there have always been professing converts meeting with the saints.¹ Indeed, even some of the most prominent leaders have proved to be apostate in the end.

In these sad times of declension today, it is my view that there are very many in the churches that are not saved people. In some streams, such as Charismatic churches and very Arminian churches, I believe that there could be as many as 90% of the congregation are not really regenerated. I have seen the fruit of such people with my own eyes. It is inconceivable that many in these churches that behave in openly unrepentant sinful ways could be saved.

So, the end will see many in the visible church that are not truly saved. It is these people that will fall away.

The visible church dominated by Satan

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

¹ For example Simon the magician (Acts 8:9ff).

4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The corollary of the falling away in the church is the enthronement of Satan in the church. The falling away allows Satan, through deception, to take his seat in the church and be revealed.

The temple of God here is the church. Paul is a New Covenant theologian and not a Dispensationalist. The temple is not a reference to a rebuilt Old Covenant, Jewish, temple in Israel; nothing could be further from the truth. Even though a rebuilt Jewish temple is being actively considered in Israel, this is irrelevant. Paul is talking about the conversion of the visible church into satanic entity.

The temple of God is both individual and corporate:

- Individual: ‘do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you’ (1 Cor 6:19).
- Corporate: ‘Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?’ (1 Cor 3:16). ‘For you are the temple of the living God’ (2 Cor 6:16). ‘You’ here is plural.

In the falling away Satan takes his seat both in individuals in the church as well as in the church corporately.

The falling away reveals the man of sin, the agent of Satan, the beast from the sea, the political power player in the final Antichristian system.² This is a corporate power that is the proxy and manifestation of Satan. Satan is being revealed in the outside world every day. Countless horrors and wickedness exemplifies that the world is under Satan all the time. That is nothing unusual and has been a constant in history. However, this manifestation is a new revealing – it is in the visible church.

At the end, the visible church experiences a falling away of truth and practice and in its place there is a revealing of Satan. What the church says and does reflects Satan and not God.

Now we have seen this progressively occur in time over the last few decades. I have explained many times about the Trojan Horses that have been brought into the church that have introduced pagan ideas, occultism, heretical doctrines and iniquitous practices. One of the worst Trojan Horses has been Charismaticism, which has introduced all sorts of occultism into the churches.

Instead of labelling these for what they are – satanic intrusions – church leaders have openly embraced evil aberrations of all sorts. Obviously wicked heretical charlatans have been allowed to preach inside evangelical churches, such as Todd Bentley, Kenneth Copeland, Rick Joyner, Paul Cain and Bob Jones; the list is endless.

Deceitful terms have been conjured up to excuse these introductions to hide their pagan origins, such as John Wimber’s ‘eastern paradigm’ used to introduce oriental mysticism, Hinduism (e.g. kundalini yoga) and Soka Gakkai Buddhism. In reality these have been satanic projects to pervert the church.

² The beast is the human agent of Satan and the reflection of him (Rev 13:4).

But the list of such projects is endless. Back in John Wesley's lifetime, Methodism had already allowed in: a belief in ghosts, mystical practices, the idea of the righteous heathen, female leaders, wailing, collapsing, and tongues. When Wesleyanism took hold in the American frontier areas, it soon gave rise to the most appalling revivalism, such as at Cane Ridge (1801) and other camp meetings, where occultism and mysticism was openly practised with similar scenes as were found in the Toronto Blessing. As today, where this form of stealth Satanism developed, so did immorality and sin. A popular saying of the times was that at such revivals '*as many people were begotten as begotten again*'; licentiousness and fornication were rife.

In the Holiness Movement this occultism continued and deepened with trances becoming popularised by Maria Woodworth-Etter. Many mystical practices developed to gain ecstatic experiences or to seek healing. Mysticism began to have free reign.

In the early Pentecostal Movement this mysticism became even more extreme. In Azusa Street not only were witches and mediums conducting seances within chaotic meetings dominated by ravings and collapsing, but total occultism was loosed with multiple demonic symptoms including: raving, screaming, uncontrolled laughing, writhing, and ladies mimicking orgiastic ecstasy. In an age when showing a female ankle was considered shocking, ladies in Pentecostal meetings hitched up their skirts to waist level in their writhing so that blankets had to be kept on hand to cover their modesty when they finally collapsed in a trance.

Efforts were made to cover this up (and continue in Pentecostal history books) but it had already made front-page news in the LA Times. Denominations that started up as the movement fragmented tried to behave more responsibly but even worse symptoms arose in the Latter Rain revival in the late 1940s. This was eventually outlawed by mainstream denominations but was resurrected in the Signs and Wonders Movement within the Charismatic churches. Paul Cain had been involved in the Latter Rain crisis and was promoted to be a major prophet by John Wimber for a time, and then by the Kansas City Prophets, where mysticism and magic became fashionable again along with heretical doctrines and iniquity practised by people such as Bob Jones.

This is just one stream of occultism that has now reached a crescendo in the Charismatic Movement. We could cover dozens of similar streams, such as PP Quimby teaching, New Thought, satanic mysticism behind the Word of Faith movement; or the Soka Gakkai visualisation and channelling promoted by Paul Yonggi Cho; or the Hindu kundalini demonic symptoms set free in the Toronto Blessing, Pensacola Revival and other works; or the magic and spiritualism passed on by the Shakers through Wimber; or the magic and witchcraft set loose by Lonnie Frisbee in Calvary Chapel and the Vineyard; plus many others.

To this we could add the multiple streams of demonic doctrine that have infested the churches from movement after movement including: Neo-Orthodoxy, Liberalism, Moody's Arminianism, New Evangelicalism, Open Theism, modern Gnosticism, Federal Vision, Dispensationalism, Messianic Christianity, heavy shepherding (UK Restorationism), authoritarianism, false apostles and prophets, modern clericalism, sacramentalism, New Ageism, Roman Catholic mysticism, and so forth. A full examination would occupy many books.

We could also add the effects of human philosophy, which have continually influenced the church negatively, such as: Deism, Postmodernism, Aristotelianism, Neo-Platonism, rationalism, evolutionary theory, uniformitarianism, liberation theology, and many more.

What is the net result? A creeping infestation of satanic ideas and practices that have become fully accepted in many churches. Today people get ‘converted’ in these churches and know nothing about true religion whatsoever. They think it normal for men to wear baseball caps in church meetings. They think it normal for women to lead and dominate a meeting. They think it exciting and spiritual that everybody falls backwards to the floor in a trance. They think that shouting gibberish is evidence of Biblical tongues. They think that pandemonium is a work of the Spirit.

This is all part of the revealing of the man of sin in the church.

who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Now I take it that the man of sin is not a singular person. I have long argued that the man of sin is corporate humanity submitted fully to Satan. There may be a single person leading the Satanic political confederation that rules the Earth at the end but the Biblical view seems to me to point to world being seen as a corporate Antichrist. Part of this humanity committed to Satan lives in the end-time church. The church becomes idolatrous and satanic.

The Devil has long wanted to dominate the church and has tried everything in history to do this but has been restrained by God (Rev 20:10). In the end he is released by God to bring things to a final conclusion. In history he tried subversion of key doctrines, such as Christology. He tried violent persecution, but that just created more disciples. He tried subversion by uniting the church with the state. He tried by the breaking up of factions from the church and setting them on a course of extremism. He tried by injecting mysticism into the church. We could go on. In all these things he failed; the church just got stronger and sharpened up her doctrines; until today.

Today we have every extremist, demonic doctrine and aberration known to history plaguing the church all at once. Instead of fighting these off, as in the past, the modern church has openly accepted them and has become utterly corrupt. There is hardly a church anywhere that is even close to God’s commands regarding doctrine and practice.

In the 1940s AW Pink, the great Bible expositor, stated that the church was even then utterly corrupt and he withdrew from pastoral ministry and church life, eventually settling in Hove and then in the Hebrides. He wrote papers in a small journal (which later were collated into his books) and sent to a couple of thousand people. Today, the church of the 1940s seems like conservatism in comparison to the extreme corruption that is in the modern churches.

Not only that, the modern church has no backbone. Throughout history churches have been oppressed by violent persecution but never relented. The Roman church met and prayed in catacombs. The Reformation churches faced warmongering armies burning entire villages but hid in woods and continued. The Scottish Covenanters faced British troops harassing, torturing, imprisoning and executing them, but they met in caves and forests. This was the pattern throughout history – the church continued whatever the cost. What happened in the last year? Almost every church in the west immediately caved in to an illegal demand by the PM to close (a judge has confirmed recently that the Scottish church was closed illegally). In the face of a very minor threat, every evangelical church in Britain closed her doors and ceased helping needy people face-to-face. This is no church.

Why did the churches cave in? Because they are dominated by satanic notions. They have no spiritual strength. They have no discernment. They have no zeal. They have no courage. They do not hear the Lord of the church.

In the end times Satan sits, via his proxies, in the church and pretends to be God. He exalts himself and opposes all that is of God and makes the churches the centre of his operations. He reigns as a usurper god from the churches. Thus the doctrines preached within the churches are demonic.

Doctrines appear today that are the very opposite of what the Bible teaches, and yet are accepted. Listing these would take a whole book but some are:

- Some churches accept the Talmud because they are focused on Messianic Christianity or Christian Zionism. The Talmud obviates and reverses the Law of Moses and endorses blasphemy and despicable sins, such as paedophilia and incest. Church leaders in America have supported the enactment of the Jewish Noahide laws. According to the definitions of Rabbi Maimonides, this would lead to the execution of Christians for idolatry.
- Churches influenced by psychoheresy (which are many) push believers into focusing on self-esteem and narcissism, instead of self-denial and sacrifice.
- Charismatic churches take away mutual edification and focus the church on an authoritarian man (called an apostle or a prophet).
- Women lead churches.
- Certain Dispensational works reverse Biblical teaching on multiple issues, including final judgment, the return of Christ, the people of God, the kingdom of God and so on.
- Word of Faith focuses believers on selfishness, greed, success and money.
- Many church leaders demand money for themselves and their ministries under various guises when this should never happen ever.³
- Some Charismatic works focus attention on demons, such as territorial spirits or personal deliverance.
- Most evangelical churches are Arminian, which denies God's sovereignty in salvation and elevates man.

This is sufficient for our purposes. Satan is sitting in the temple of God – and most Christians have not noticed! Even worse, they persecute those of us who draw attention to this atrocity. I have been called all sorts of names and accused of all sorts of evils by people that can never make any sort of case to defend their accusations; they even deny universally accepted standards and creeds. This in itself is indicative of demonic deception.

The key to this satanic success is stealth. Deception does not succeed when it is launched as an all-out direct attack; then it is perceived. It succeeds when it follows the boiling frog analogy. Slowly and by stealth deception overturns right thinking unless you have discernment. If you let a camel poke its nose in the tent, before long the camel will be in the tent making it its home. If you drip feed small errors, they build up into dominating dogmas.

Where are the challenges? When church leaders preach seriously heretical doctrines, where are the challenges from the congregation? Yes it creates suffering, but it is the job of a congregation to hold the pastor to account. If they fail, they are accountable before God on the Day of Judgment. What you accept will be the measure of your judgment by God.

³ Biblical leaders live by faith, not salaries or by making demands.

We must challenge and accept the consequences.

I try to avoid personal memoirs but here is a relevant case in point. In 1989 I challenged an internationally famous, so-called apostle that led the church I was a leader in. We had previously been friends, shared meals for years and I had travelled with him. He was taking the church into a terrible wrong direction that promoted his ministry and ruined the local fellowship. It also destroyed the successful local work that I had been instrumental in building. My challenge lasted three hours and it destroyed the leader friend that was with me; he never recovered. The apostle got very angry and irrational but I laid out my case calmly and backed it up in writing. This confrontation cost me my leadership (I resigned) and my ministry, and eventually my membership of the church I had contributed ten years of my life to. I lost virtually all my friends and many crossed the road to avoid me. I was accused of heresy and insubordination (all lies) but worst of all the shock of the experience destabilised my wife and family and led to tragic results.

Yet I was right to make this challenge. I obeyed my conscience, even though it cost me dear. Would I do it again; yes I would.

All errors of doctrine and practice must be confronted in every way possible. Any error left alone to grow will only lead to more errors following. One hole in the dam will eventually lead to the dam breaking. Through leaving errors unchallenged, Satan managed to gradually control most churches. Very few in the world today can be considered to be Biblical.

9 The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Failing to focus upon the truth has devastating consequences.

The truth keeps Satan away and sets us free. Satan cannot stand the truth. The truth is light and the light overcomes darkness (Jn 1:4-5). The truth is also life, and life overcomes death (Jn 1:4). Errors bring death. Sin brings death (Rm 5:12, 21, 6:16). The flesh brings death (Rm 7:5, 8:13). Satan brings death (Jm 1:14-15; Heb 2:14). When Satan dominates a church there is no life, no light, only death.

The domination of Satan is achieved inwardly and outwardly.

Satan uses external things to convince people to follow him. These include false signs and wonders, works of power. Even though the Sign and Wonders Movement was bereft of real power (the healings were never genuine but a temporary psychological boost) even the promise of miracles was enough to get hundreds of thousands of Christians to sign up.

But most commonly, Satan uses internal issues: temptation and deceit. People accept deception in their heart and mind and then Satan gets control of the soul.

What is the result of this? Destruction. People so affected perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Yet these are churchgoers; are they not all saved? No they are not, as I have earlier explained. People who stay in unrighteous and erroneous works are deceived people and thus are in danger of perishing. Their faith is superficial because it is not proved by works.

What is shocking is that deceived people always get worse. If the deception is not confronted and the truth accepted, God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the satanic lie. They are then condemned because they did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. If you accept and continue in deception, a demonic doctrine, an unbiblical aberration, you are not believing the truth and become unrighteous. If you are proved to be unrighteous because you follow demonic doctrines, then you were never justified in the first place.

Can this be? Can long-term churchgoers fall into unrighteous apostasy? Yes, I have seen it often first hand. Consider how many famous church leaders with an impeccable background became apostate in the last 30 years; people that were shown to be homosexual, alcoholics, abusers, fornicators, adulterers, fraudsters and so on. Go back 100 years and see many more. Some men that led international ministries died in a drunken state in a dirty motel or were caught with a prostitute. I have seen leader's wives with an unimpeachable record leave their husbands and abandon their children to run off with a man. Three times I have seen other leader's wives run off with a woman. I have seen leaders commit fraud and much more. I have seen famous leaders lie.

Look through church history (so few bother) and see how many seemingly good men became infatuated with a certain error and this led to more errors, then aberrations and finally a ruined life. Edward Irving is but one example of a fine preacher gradually destroyed in a scandalous, demonised church.

If you are deceived you are unrighteous. If you do not confront this and repent, you will be further deluded and fall into condemnation. By this means Satan gains more control of the church. The more a leader is led astray, the easier it is for Satan to control him, and thus control the direction of the church. Most churches are ruined by the ambitions of dominating leaders.

The point is well made; Satan is controlling the churches and sits there in the temple of God, corporately and individually. This was prophesied 2,000 years ago and we are seeing it grow in fulfilment every day. Do not accuse me of exaggeration; Paul has made this very clear in this passage. The situation is serious.

Key text: Lk 18:8

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

It cannot be avoided. The Lord here is expecting a negative reply.

Robertson says this about the Greek:

The use of *ara* before *e`urhsei* seems to indicate a question expecting a negative answer as in Ac 8:30; Ro 14:19. But here *ara* comes in the middle of the sentence instead of near the beginning, an unusual position for either inferential *ara* or

interrogative *ara*. On the whole the interrogative *ara* is probably correct, meaning to question if the Son will find a persistence of faith like that of the widow.⁴

The Louw-Nida lexicon says,

a=ra: a marker of a negative response to questions, usually implying anxiety or impatience - 'indeed, then, ever.' *a=ra eu`rh,sei th.n pi,stin* 'will he find faith?' Lk 18.8.

In order to attempt to do some justice to the occurrence of the particle *a=ra*, one may introduce a variety of terms which make a question somewhat more emphatically negative. In the case of Lk 18.8 one might translate 'will he indeed find faith?'

So the negative expectation is emphatic.

We have to come to terms with what this means for the end time church.

On the one hand the church at the end will come to fulness; the full number of the elect is saved and there is a hidden but complete testimony to the Lord in the hidden church in the wilderness.

What must be borne in mind here is the outward, external, visible church seen in the world at large. In terms of outward profession will there be a testimony of faith in Christ? The answer is no.

This puts paid to a number of eschatological systems, and especially Postmillennialism. But my concern here is the testimony.

The church that meets in public at the end is not a place of faith and submission to Christ because it is dominated by Satan; it is the seat of Satan. The end-time visible church is under the control of God's enemies who are dominated by Satan.

An analogy of this would be the Chinese church in the age of Mao (and to some extent still today). The true church was huge, being led by able people like Wang Ming Dao and survived in hidden house churches in the interior (churches that owed their origin to Hudson Taylor's work). However, the external Three-Self Movement church, the compromised church run by the state, was tolerated because it was polluted. Visitors to China saw the state church that had no faith but did not see the hidden church that did.

Conclusion

Believers need to get their minds round the fact that the visible external church is not going to be dissolved by the antichristian world system, it is going to be taken over. The Devil wants it to prosper but to be in his own image. This makes his seeming victory complete; he has taken his seat in the place of Christ.

The external church is no place to be in these days anymore. Believers should flee and create hidden house churches where they can meet Biblically. This is a warning to all. Leave external churches and create house churches now while you still can. The day is coming when this will not be possible due to persecution; but it is still possible today. Institutional churches are doomed. Churches meeting secretly in homes are the only way forward.

⁴ Robertson's Word Pictures in loc.

What more lessons do you need. All evangelical churches in Britain shut themselves down in the last year because a wicked lying government told them to. No one sought the Lord. No one obeyed Scripture (perhaps one or two did). This exactly proves my thesis. Church leaders obeyed satanically-driven panjandrums and openly disobeyed God without even any real threats. They were not attacked by a Stalin or a Mao and threatened with torture and death, they were merely asked by Matt Hancock – and they obeyed!!!

The churches have shown their colours. They do not obey God.

This is but the beginning. Gradually, the outward church will become the seat of Satan in even worse terms.

If you are blessed by divine providence to have a church that serves God, follows Jesus Christ, obeys Biblical doctrines and the congregation loves each other, you are blessed indeed. Were that more churches had such a testimony. However, the time is coming when even these churches will need to meet secretly in homes.

We Brits have always celebrated the fact that we are the home of parliamentary democracy and have a long tradition of civil liberties gained from the efforts of our forefathers, many of whom were Christians. In the 1930s and 40s we thanked God that we lived in England and not Nazi Germany. In the 1920s we thanked God that we lived in Britain and not the Bolshevik Soviet Union. In the 1940s we thanked God that we did not live in Mainland China under Mao. Such totalitarian regimes could not exist in a free society with conventions, traditions and Common Law that ensured basic human freedoms, including freedom to worship. However, the last year has proved that such a hope is gone.

We are already in a totalitarian society that is now approaching fascism. Not only did the government ban worship meetings for a year or more, now that restrictions have lifted somewhat the police recently invaded a Polish Catholic church, took over the lectern and demanded everybody go home or face a fine. This was unlawful, but the police felt empowered to do this. Such scenes have been repeated around the world. It is not missed on me that this was at Easter, the most important institutional church festival. The co-ordinated police invasions are not an accident – at a time when Covid infection, deaths and hospitalisation are at an all-time low (lower than June 2020 when the nation unlocked).

We are already in a dystopian, totalitarian society that is getting worse (e.g. with vaccine passports you need state permission to enter venues already, soon to be everywhere). The church needs to wake up. Public church meetings in public buildings are now going to be a thing of the past. Get out of them and set up secret home churches before it's too late.

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