

## Apostasy and Christ's Return

### II Thessalonians 2:1-3

*“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophesy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs.”*

### II Timothy 4:3-4

*“For the time will come when men and women will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”*

### Intro:

Have you ever seen a man walking down the street holding a sign that reads:

**“Repent! Judgment is Coming!”?**

I don’t know how that made you feel, and I’ll be perfectly honest, it always made me feel a little uncomfortable, I always try not to look at them.

Why? Because they yell at you – condemning you to hell if you look at them.

I’m not here to yell at any one this morning.

**However, is the man with this sign bearing a message that is wrong? NO!**

This message is not taken very seriously by the majority of people these days.

As a matter of fact this man is pictured as rather eccentric and out of touch with reality. But is he?

**Is the Day of the Lord to be taken seriously? YES it is!!**

What would you think of a Bishop of a mainline denomination saying the following?

- The Resurrection of Christ was not a real event but a legend.
- There was no empty tomb, no angels, no appearances
- No reasonable person could believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible
- The virgin birth of Christ; the announcement of such in a manger in Bethlehem “will have to go.”
- The church should actively endorse and even celebrate homosexual behavior, as well as heterosexual liaisons outside of marriage.

John Shelby Spong, the Episcopal bishop of Newark, NJ promotes these in his book entitled: **Why Christianity Must Change or Die.**

I have felt God impressing upon me this thought for quite some time.

This passage suggest several things will occur before Christ returns:

**First, there will be a rebellion, literally apostasy – an Abandonment.**

**This will not be a rebellion against the church so much as a defection within the ranks of the church.**

**Second, an individual described as The Man of Lawlessness will come to power, and this man is none other than the Anti Christ.**

**I John 2:18 says, “Dear Children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”**

Show Film Clip: **AntiChrist**

This is why I personally feel we must have an emphasis upon every one of us helping to lead another unsaved person to Jesus Christ this year which we call

**“Each One Win One.”**

Why have emphases on this?

Why can't we cannot just have Church as usual!

**There are three things I believe we have to do in regards to this Scripture that we have read:**

- First, and foremost we have awaken and be challenged to reach the unsaved and lost people without Jesus.
- We have to guard against being shaken or troubled by the Day of the Lord. This is the one we will start with this morning.
- We cannot allow any one to deceive us.
- Know and understand there will be a Great Falling Away before His Coming.
- We must witness to the Lost to come to Jesus while they still have a chance.

**1. We have to guard against being shaken or troubled by the Day of the Lord. Vv. 1-2**

**The Apostle Paul said:**

***“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.***

Apparently in the church at Thessalonica, or some members of it, had become dismayed because a rumor had circulated that the **“Day of the Lord”** had come and gone and they had missed it.

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Paul corrected this falsehood immediately by denouncing this as someone who had misrepresented the truth and claimed it was Paul.

But let's just imagine this here this morning.

What if the Rapture would happen and many within the Church would miss this great event?

How does that make you feel this morning to think of such a possibility?

I want to be transparent here this morning and let you know something that bothers me from time to time.

**Story:** Do you all remember the date of 1988?

There was a man who predicted that Jesus was going to Rapture His Church on a certain day in 1988.

I was the pastor in West Jefferson.

I got a copy of his presentation and read it.

He used a lot of good scripture and history stuff to present his cause.

Well, that day came and went and my wife and I and every one from my church was still here.

As a matter of fact, I got up during the middle of the night and went outside and looked up into the star lit skies and didn't see anyone and know of anything that happened.

I didn't hear of anyone else going up either, so I dismissed it.

It was the next weekend – I can't remember what I was doing, but I went to look for my wife and my children and couldn't find them anywhere.

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Do you know what the first thing went through my mind was?

The guy missed his prediction by a few days and I missed the Rapture.

I looked for my wife, because I know if anyone is going to make it to heaven, it's my wife.

But I looked for her and the kids everywhere and couldn't find them.

Imagine the feeling of missing this Great Event – the Rapture of the Church.

Finally, Drusilla came walking down the sidewalk with the children on either side of her coming from visiting a new neighbor.

I've awakened at night in a cold sweat with this awful feeling of being left behind.

You know folks, the job of the enemy of our souls is to cause confusion and fear about what is going to happen in the future.

And I agree this morning that this subject can be a confusing topic and I also agree that some people get fearful about it. And a good fear is healthy!

There are some people who can't stand the thought of studying Revelation or Prophecy that deals with the Last Days because it scares them.

And the enemy will take this favorite method and cause confusion and fear about the End of Times.

The believers at Thessalonica thought the Day of the

Lord had come – **that Great and Terrible Day when God’s Judgment was to fall upon the earth.**

**They were visibly Shaken.**

This word “*Shaken*” means to be tossed about, agitated, shocked and troubled.

It means to live in a continued state of tension and nervousness.

Paul says, “*Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs.*”

**The First Event that will launch the Day of the Lord will be a Great Falling away of believers from within the Church.**

## **2. The Great “Falling Away”**

**" And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Matt. 24:10-11 RSV).**

The Apostle Paul prophesied that a time would come when men and women would turn away from the faith “*once for all delivered saints*” as stated in Titus and instead embrace heresy.

The phrase “falling away” *found in the KJV is much too weak for what the Greek language expresses.*

The Apostle Paul is saying that before the Day of the Lord and the Revealing of the Man of Sin, there will be first a “rebellion” or a “Departing.”

**The word is used twice in the New Testament, and it means the abandonment of the faith.**

The Original Greek word is translated “*apostasia.*”

**\*\*We get our English word Apostasy, which means a defection from the truth of God.\*\***

The Man of Lawlessness will be empowered by Satan to give evidence of his authority with power and signs and false wonders And many will be deceived.

**It carries with it a defection from the true and genuine Church of Jesus Christ.**

**What causes Apostasy?**

**1. Forsaking spiritual living causes apostasy (Heb. 10:25-31).**

*Heb 10:24-31*

*24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,  
25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.  
26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

*27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

*28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

*29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*

*30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."*

*31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

(NKJ)

## 2. Personality conflicts cause apostasy.

Often people are so constituted that they cannot work and get along with others;

they are overly sensitive,  
have their feelings hurt too easily,  
and soon withdraw from all participation.  
They just decide to quit.

All of us know of people who once were believers in Christ who are now no longer in His Church anywhere and they have fallen away in apostasy.

## 3. When believers do not accept the inerrancy of God's Word it results in apostasy.

Let me give you some **shocking statistics** from George Barna Research that relates to the Churches in America.

To understand this chart – these **two categories are born-again Christians:**

1. **B.A.C. with a Biblical Worldview** which includes people who believe in absolute moral truth; make their moral choices by following a set of specific principles or standards based on the Bible, and they trust Christ as their Savior
2. **The second group of B.A.C.'s without a Biblical Worldview** who have made a personal commitment to Christ and believe they will go to heaven because they confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their Savior, **but they do not believe in absolute moral truth or the inerrancy of the Word of God,** nor do they make moral choices by following a set of specific principles based on the Bible.

Perhaps I can show you better by giving you the following:

**BAC/s with BWV**

**without BWV**

**100% Bible is totally accurate**

**only 59%**

**100% Responsibility to tell others about Jesus**

**51% without a BWV don't believe they do.**

**100% The Devil is real**

**only 22%**

**100% Jesus was sinless**

**only 51%**

**92% The Bible specifically condemns homosexual;**

**Only 47% of the other group condemns**

**This is what we mean by apostasy in the modern church today in America.**

This could also mean that those who first believed the Word of God - strayed from the truth and the enemy was able to gain a victory over them, because they did not stay faithful and committed to becoming genuine disciples and growing in the Lord.

Tim LaHaye says, “**Conditions will be ripe for people, especially for those who call themselves Christians but are not really such, to turn their backs on God and His Church in what they do as well as in what they already have in thought.**”

Leon Morris says, “**In the last times there will be an outstanding manifestation of the powers of evil arrayed against God.**”

**The point is this: before the Day of the Lord – before the terrible judgment of God can come upon the earth – there will be a Great Apostasy, a tragic turning away from God by millions of believers.**

**The revolt and the rebellion against God will be so massive that it will necessitate the return of Christ in judgment.**

Man and his world will be so evil and sinful, so immoral and unjust, so much in rebellion against God that Christ

has to return to judge the world.

Most of the people in the world will have gone so far that they will be beyond ever repenting.

Listen to Jesus when He says in Matthew 24:10-13 “***and then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall be cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.***”

### **Illustration:**

What would it be like to witness millions turning away from the Lord and His Church?

It would be a vivid nightmare for any one of us to dream let alone experience, and yet this is happening in America today.

Peek into one man’s dreams.

Right away you see him tossing and turning, fighting to wake up from the horror which has gripped him.

Allow him to share with you his horrible dream and his plight.

He says, “It was as if the world turned upside down. I could hardly believe my eyes as people I knew turned their backs on God. These people went to church and

knew the right things to say. But all of them met together and declared to God that they intended to finish the rebellion that Lucifer and his angels had begun ages ago. Only this time, they intended to dethrone God and assume control of creation.”

This man explained his dream further by saying, “I got caught up in the excitement of the meeting and began to voice my support with the others. After I yelled, “Down with God!” I got this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. My mind began to re-run old memories of all that God had done for me as a child. He had healed me from a serious sickness. He constantly provided food and shelter for me and my family. We never went without the necessities.

What went wrong? To tell you the truth, I went wrong. I simply got tired of God telling what I had to do. I found it a whole lot easier following others/rebels than to follow the Good Shepherd. But, I’ve got to change some things now.

In my dream, the last scene made an impression of me that I’ll never forget.

God swept His hand into that crowd of rebels and set us all up like dominos on their ends. And then, with a flick of His finger, each one toppled over the other. As each one fell, the earth opened up and flames consumed them. I was the last domino. My eyes got bigger and bigger as the one before rocked into me – and I began to fall backwards ... and then I woke up, bathed in sweat!

### **Application:**

**When God starts to tip the dominos on the Day of the Lord, will you be in that line, or will you stand aside and be counted with the faithful?**

**2. The Second thing that will launch the Day of the Lord will be the Revelation of that man of sin – in which the Word of God calls – “The son of Perdition, that is the Anti-Christ himself.**

**Some day and I feel soon the Anti Christ will be revealed.**

A.T. Robertson says, “...the implication is that the man of sin is hidden somewhere ... and will be suddenly manifested.”

**The Anti-Christ is “the man of sin.”**

The word here for “Sin” is “Lawlessness;” that is, the antichrist will be the man of lawlessness or total rebellion against God.

He will persuade those within and without the church to leave their faithfulness to God to give up; to quit.

He will do everything he can to lead a total revolt against God – do all he can to lead every man and every woman, and every child to turn away from God.

**We get a sobering picture of this end-of-time falling away when we study the Savior’s own words recorded**

**in Revelation chapter 3 when Jesus describes the Church of Laodicea.**

**Now remember that these seven churches all represent a certain era in church history.**

**Laodicea is the final church in the series of the seven.**

**It is this church that illustrates what the church will be like just before the Rapture occurs.**

**Listen to what Jesus our Lord says about this apostate church:**

*“15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.*

Unlike the church at Ephesus, which is well known for its evangelistic outreaches, Laodicea left no record of any gospel preaching in its area.

Of the Seven Churches profiled in Revelation 2 -3 Laodicea is the only church where Christ had nothing good to say about.

**Believers – listen to me – Laodicea represents the church of our time.**

This church of the last days was neither zealous for good works nor were they lifeless. **Instead they were just indifferent about the unsaved.**

**It claimed to represent Jesus Christ but never saw souls transformed from darkness to life.**

**Does the church today in America look like the church of Laodicea?**

- Certainly the church today is rich.
- We have the best buildings in the world to worship in.
- To anyone else who would even look at our building from a third world country, we would be their envy.

**3. My third and last point is – We must do everything we can NOW to witness to the Lost and Get Them Saved while they still can.**

**A Gallup poll indicated as of 2003 that 41% of the American population claims to be “Born Again.”**

**One man said, “Were is not for the moving of the Holy Spirit and the obedience of millions of Christians to the plain teaching of Scripture, America would today be a totally secularized nation, thus destroying the greatest source of world missions in**

**history. Instead, even in this day of denominational apostasy, the Holy Spirit is working in the hearts of enormous numbers of true believers. It has intrigued me that those churches that teach the Bible, depend upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and do the work of evangelism are growing, dynamic congregations. At the same time, apostate churches are dying by the thousands – another sign of the end times.”**

No one knows for certain when Christ will return to this earth.

Every one who I have read and studied and those who are strong into their understanding of prophesy tell us that Christ will come in their lifetime.

**The generation of people, which would include almost all of us saw Israel become a nation restored in 1948.**

I was 1 year old when this happened.

In Matthew 24:32-34 Jesus said, 32 *"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.*

What Jesus was saying is that this strategic generation will not pass until this will come to pass.

When you and I examine all the “**Signs of the times**”

that have been fulfilled in our lifetime, you have to believe the Coming of Jesus Christ is very near.

Jesus said, *“Near, even at the doors.”*

**Application: Why should we be concerned about our own spiritual walk with God and for the Lost and the Unsaved and Why should we become more evangelistic in fervor?**

This generation – which is us – have more solid reason to believe Christ could come at any time.

Dr. John Walvoord, the most knowledgeable living prophecy scholar in the world today, said the following at a prophecy conference about the times in which we live:

**“In have been studying prophecy for many years (over fifty), and while I do not believe it is possible to set dates for the Lord’s return, I do sense in the world today an unprecedented time of world crises that can be interpreted as being preparatory for the coming of the Lord. If there ever was a time when Christians should live every day as though Christ could come at any time, it is today.”**

Paul said in II Corinthians 4:1-8

***1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend***

*ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel is hid, it is hid to those who are perishing (lost). 4 The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

*7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair..."*

### What is our Great Commission from our Lord?

*Matthew 28:18-20 "Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: "God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age." The Message*

### Closing:

The story is told of a little girl who had trouble sleeping one night. Her bedroom was upstairs, and her parents were

downstairs reading.

First, she asked for a glass of water, then a cookie, and then she wanted to know what time it was.

Finally, her parents' patience ran out, and they warned her to go to sleep, threatening to punish her if she called them again.

The best she could do was lie there, watching the ceiling and listening for the striking of the grandfather clock downstairs.

When the clock struck eleven, something must have gone wrong mechanically, because as she counted the hours, the clock tolled eleven and kept on going: 12, 13, 14.

When the clock got to 18, she threw caution to the wind, jumped out of her bed, ran downstairs, and cried, "Mom – Dad – it's later than it's ever been."

That is what I am trying to say to you this morning.

Prophetically, it is later than it has ever been.

Could we somehow grasp this and allow this truth to literally change us so that we will never be the same until Jesus comes?

Why?

Because no generation of Christians ever had more reason for believing He could come in their lifetime than does ours!

And if we know will we tell others who don't know it? Tell them that Jesus loves them and Jesus died for them and Jesus wants them to go to heaven.