

STAND FAST IN CHRIST JESUS

2 Thessalonians 2

The Great Apostasy

Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 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. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. 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. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Stand Fast

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

This is the second letter that Paul had written to the church in Thessalonica and Paul was primarily addressing the church in regards to false teachings and what appears by Paul's wording, that even false letters had been written in Paul or the Apostles' names that was saying that the "Day of the Lord" was already upon them. What lent to that false supposition was that at that time there were persecutions of the church and it was then being said, by false teachers, that Jesus had already whisked away the saints and was now judging the evil on the earth or even that there was and is no resurrection. When Jesus comes back again to gather up His saints

there will be no mistaking it. As Jesus said, "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (**Matthew 24:26-27**) The overall message in all of this passage of Scripture is that in the face of tribulation, in the trials of longsuffering, in waiting for Jesus to take us off this wretched planet, with all of its corruption and deceptions and antichrists, as it increases in lawlessness and godlessness, we are to stand fast in the hope of the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Clinging to Jesus for He is our life!

The Apostle Peter, in speaking of the profound teachings of the Apostle Paul, of the deep mysteries that are now revealed to us in Christ Jesus, he was first referring to the eventual new heavens and a new earth but then speaks of the "Day of the Lord" saying, "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things [which is the new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells], be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that **the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation**—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." As I already mentioned, Peter was speaking of the day of the Lord, AND that will come as a thief in the night to which will at some point usher in the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." The Apostle Peter though recognized the hard to understand teachings of Paul, such as in our passage of Scripture that says, "And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. 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." But then Paul goes on to speak of how the lawless one will come and deceive many, "with all power, signs, and lying wonders." Looking at what Peter says, "**the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.**" That can have two meanings. One is that Jesus is holding back from coming until all who are called and will heed his call. Secondly though, it also speaks of the longsuffering of the Lord within us is our salvation. It can be compared to the Word that says, "He who endures to the end will be saved." Various forms of that are spoken of by Jesus, Paul, Peter, and the Apostle John (such as how Jesus spoke that to all of the 7 churches in Asia in the book of Revelation).

First and foremost, we are led to believe by the many testimonies that are written in the Word of God, to which the Holy Spirit testifies to us, that Jesus died on the cross once, for all sins, and

then rose from the dead on the third day, and is now seated on His throne at the right hand of God the Father, who is also seated on His throne. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)

The Apostle Paul goes on to explain, that we after believing on Christ, that God isn't finished with us. We don't just believe and then walk away doing our own thing, just waiting for the Lord's return. He says in **Romans 6:10-11**, "For the death that He [Jesus] died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." There are two things that can be seen in that passage, first is that Jesus paid the full price of the penalty that was due us by dying on the cross for our sins. He took our punishment, that is, the wrath of God that was against us, He took our sins upon Himself so that we can be 1. forgiven of our sins, 2. to be reconciled back to God, that is, to be able to have communion with Him, meaning to have a perfect relationship with Him (that perfection won't come until we see Christ though), and then 3 that we may have eternal life in God's eternal kingdom, through Christ and in Christ.

The second thing we can get from **Romans 6:10-11** is that in Christ we are to "reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." We are no longer to be living for the lusts of the flesh, the desires of the world, and our pride of life, and in trying to gain our place in this world, after all the world WILL pass away, but we are surrendering our will for God's, our sin for His righteousness, our desires of this world for God's promise that He has a place for us in the new heavens and earth in His new and eternal kingdom. Getting back to what Peter was saying about "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." As mentioned, Christ bore our sins upon Himself and took on the wrath of God that was due us, but there is still His longsuffering **toward us** in getting us to where He has planned for us (and yes, some of us are a bit more stubborn and self-willed than others). But also, through the Holy Spirit, Christ works in us, the fruit of the Spirit which is, "love, joy, peace, **longsuffering**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (**Galatians 5:22-23**) He is in us, with us, and bearing the pain of that same longsuffering that we have to endure. What Peter also said in **2 Peter 3:9** speaks of that saying, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is **longsuffering toward us**, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to **repentance**." But at some point, as we see from our passage of Scripture in 2 Thessalonians 2, God will eventually pull

back from His longsuffering from us, in the very last of days as Paul is referring to, but also generally speaking. At some point God will give someone up to their godlessness, giving them a reprobate mind.

In our passage of Scripture in **2 Thessalonians 2**, Paul says that the Day of the Lord will not come until first there is a great falling away first. Jesus describes that period by saying, "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But **he who endures to the end shall be saved.**" (**Matthew 24:11-13**) There are many periods throughout history, after Christ's death, to where that could have applied. There has been many, many, many false religions over the past 2000 years. The way we can test those false religions is matching them up to the Word of God. One very apparent to us from historical books or documents is the period of the rise of the Roman Catholic church to where people were paying money to the church for the forgiveness of sins, which were called indulgences. Another thing that accrued earlier in history, after the death of Christ were the Christian crusades, that is, the killing of others in the name of Christ. Did not Jesus say to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us? While the Pope and the Catholic church were behind some of the crusades, a great many of them were just under the guise of being in the name of Christ and were just about the gaining of land or wealth or power. What's interesting to note though is that all of the churches in the region that is now modern day Turkey of which is the 7 churches of Asia, that is mentioned in the first 3 chapters of Revelation, is now 99.8 percent Muslims and only .2% Christians and Jews.¹ Israel, which is the birthplace of Christianity is now 74% Jewish and only 1.9% Christian.² That, you could say, is a great falling away. Yet what can also be going on in that is not just that everyone within Israel and Turkey has rejected Christianity and Christ, but that is where those people are who have rejected Christ. We all, I assume, have heard of the history of the Puritans who left their homes in England and sailed west to what is now our United States of America to be able to freely worship God without the tyranny of the government.

Using the same source though that I used for the stats on Israel and Turkey, that is a website run by cia.gov called "The World Factbook", the United States today is said to be 46.5% Protestant, that is what could be deemed mainstream Christianity, and 20.8% Roman Catholic. Combining those two alone gives us a total of 67.1% of the population in this country that claim to be Christian. Can anybody in their right mind, with an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ possibly believe that 67.1% of our population are Christians? As the Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian church, which is by the way in

1 World Factbook, The, Turkey,
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/turkey-turkiye>

2 World Factbook, The, Israel,
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/israel>

present day Greece, as is the church of the Thessalonians, he said that in Christ we are cleansed of our sins, sanctified (meaning we are set apart in God's holiness), and we are then justified. Does it appear to you that 67% of the people you come across on a daily basis, which means that every other person you meet, is supposedly a Christian? Do they exhibit the life of one who is sanctified in Christ Jesus, living as one who is set apart in the holiness of God?

As has been mentioned before, it can be said that we ARE sanctified in Christ Jesus, that is by being cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (that's Christ), but we are also BEING sanctified. The writer of Hebrews says, "For by one offering He has **perfected forever** those who are being sanctified." (**Hebrews 10:14**) The same then can be said about how we ARE perfected in Christ Jesus but are also BEING perfected. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 7:1**, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the **fear of God.**" We have the promise from God though in **1 John 3:2**, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." THEN, we will be perfectly perfected in Christ Jesus. Even the Apostle Paul would not claim to have arrived at the place of perfection, even though he was, as we are, perfected in Christ. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." (**Philippians 3:12**)

What that tells us is, that we are perfected and being perfected IN CHRIST. We are not saved by our righteous deeds and good works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (**Ephesians 2:8-10**) What God is working in us, His Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption (**1 Corinthians 1:30**) should then, be manifesting in our character and in our lives, just as the fruit of the Spirit should be evident. No, none of us will be perfect, at all times, in being perfect and holy as He is holy, but it should be seen by the folks of the world as well as to your brothers and sisters in Christ. It should be evident of whom you serve and are saved by, and who you live for, whether in righteousness which leads to life, or sin that leads to death.

Getting back to our Scripture in 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul says, the day of the Lord won't first come until there is a falling away of the faith and "the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 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." He then says, that God will allow those

persons "who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" to be given up to the delusion of the lie that will be upon the earth." Notice once again, as we have seen time and again in Scripture, that the opposition to the Truth is in unrighteousness. All of the people who are hanging on to their pet sins, their idols, the things they would rather do than give God the glory and live in His Righteousness, they will be given up to their sins and follow a lie, a false god. We see that a lot in the world even today. You know how James says in **James 4:10**, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up"? It reminded me of what Jesus said in His sermon on the Mount to where He said, "**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**" (**Matthew 5:5**) But it also reminded me of what Peter said in **1 Peter 2:9**, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Humble yourself before God and seek His mercies and grace and He WILL lift you out of the darkness and into His marvelous light! That can also have a double meaning, that is, of humbling ourselves before God that He may lift us up. It speaks of a continuing in the humility of Christ to where, as we ARE in Christ, we live according to the humility of Christ and at the last trump HE WILL LIFT YOU UP! Paul said that the "wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience." (**Colossians 3:6**) I don't want to find out what that means. Do you?

Unfortunately even now there are many who will claim to be Christian who are living in a delusion, a lie, as Paul said to the Ephesians, "the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." (**Ephesians 2:2-3**) As I've said before, I am very concerned about many people who are clinging to the hope that they are saved just because they BELIEVE Jesus died on the cross for their sins but then there is no evidence of the fruit of the Spirit working in them as they continue in the desires of the flesh, to live in their own lusts that are contrary to the workings of the Spirit. I am not judging anyone. I hold to that same fear of God that I have for others. I fear with a godly fear that some will stand before Jesus and Jesus will say as He did in **Matthew 7:21-23**, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'**" That is pretty scary!

This message to us from the Word is not to dishearten God's people. Many of God's people, here and in our community, myself included, are

doing our best to do as Jesus said, to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourself, even though surely we all fall short of that, yet nevertheless the world around us seems to be drifting further into the abyss, being led by a lie of tolerance and lawlessness, as Jesus put it. But as we are called to be longsuffering in Christ as God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance". We are now called to continue to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ which includes Jesus telling us in His Great Commission "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47)

We ARE also called to the longsuffering in Christ as God continues to finalize those who are called into His eternal kingdom. That doesn't mean though that we should be partakers of those who are possibly perishing. That certainly doesn't mean we shouldn't ever be around them. We all probably have friends and family who are not "saved" but it certainly isn't going to help them if we just cut ourselves off from them. Right? Yet there are some people, I won't clarify, so to protect the innocent and the guilty, but there are some people who I can only be around for so long before I just have to remove myself from their presence. They will try, whether knowingly or not, to entangle you in the web of sin and lies that they are entrapped in. I always have the hope of course for them as I do my best to love them as Jesus loves me, and to pray for their souls and their salvation or deliverance. But we must realize that it seems as though it is going to get worse in this nation before it gets better. We're still hoping and praying for our nation, for our community, or for those that God has placed in our lives but it is a guarantee that we will partake in the sufferings in Christ. As Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Consider what the Apostle says in how he ties together believing on Christ, being obedient to the Word, and then overcoming in Christ, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world**. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:1-5) That is our confidence that we have in Christ Jesus! As we are born-again, and receive the Holy Spirit, we are then led to love God, obey God, and to love others and we WILL OVERCOME the world in Christ Jesus. It is in Jesus who is the tie that binds us together. The

prayer of Jesus before His being crucified on a cross will eventually be fulfilled when He prayed, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:21) Do you believe that? Will you believe that? It is not too late to begin to put your trust in Jesus. "whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." (Romans 9:33) We are called to stand fast in Christ Jesus, which means to stand firm, remain determined, in our "salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" and cling to Jesus for He IS our life!

As Paul encouraged the church of Thessalonica, may we also be encouraged. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren **beloved by the Lord**, because God from the beginning **chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit** and belief in the truth [remember believing in truth is associated with being obedient to the truth], to which He called you by our gospel, for the **obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Therefore, brethren, **stand fast** and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."