



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

The Apostasy

(A message preached at the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony afternoon meeting held in New Life Presbyterian Church hall (kindly granted) in West Kilburn, London, on Friday 26th September, 2014, by Rev Ivan Foster)

"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," 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

In the verses before us we have an apostle in the 1st century lamenting the fact that believers are deceived about the coming again of Christ. Of course, we may see that the disciples, right up until the Saviour's ascension were also confused about this subject, for did they not ask Him if He would at that time "restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6).

It has ever been the purpose of the devil to spread confusion about the Bible's teaching of this subject.

TROUBLING

Such confusion has dire consequences for the people of God. Error about the second coming of Christ troubles the child of God and shakes them in their minds. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by (concerning) the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by (concerning) 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," 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2. It is not a trivial matter to misinterpret the Holy Scriptures on the subject of the Lord's return. These believers were in danger of being "shaken in mind" or tossed about as with a storm and of being "troubled", which means to be distressed and frightened.

Paul here is writing to correct the error and so deliver the people of Thessalonica from the ills that such falsehoods would breed.

It should be noted that Paul clearly says: "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," verse 3. A great "falling away" will come before the return of Christ. Therefore we must be watchful for this apostasy for it will herald the approach of the second advent of Christ. Our subject then has great importance.

MEANING

It may seem elementary to most of you here, but I wish to set forth the meaning of the word "APOSTASY" at the beginning of this message.

The Greek form of the word (apostasia) appears in our text and in Acts 21:21 where it is translated by the English word "forsake". It is linked to the English word "divorce". That should help us to understand its meaning. It refers to a public, formal putting away of all profession of faith in the God of the Bible.

To that dreadful finale the pilgrimage of mankind is inexorably drawing near.

NATURE

As it is with the course of nature so it will be with the spiritual realm. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body," Romans 8:22-23. The physical world "groaneth and travaileth in pain" as it waits for the glorious deliverance that will come at the time the bodies of the redeemed are glorified when Christ shall appear. It is then that the curse, referred to in verses 19-21, shall be largely alleviated and the whole creation shall cease its groaning. But, in the meantime, the process of death and decline and decay is at



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

work throughout God's creation just as it is in the spiritual domain.

Paul clearly teaches in these verses that before the Day of the Lord there MUST come a great apostasy.

It is a gross DECEPTION for any man to teach otherwise.

The Bible abounds with warnings about the apostasy. As a particularly ferocious storm is warned of by our weather forecasters, even so the Lord warns of the coming of the spiritual storm that will bring this age to an end. However, God's forecasts are entirely accurate.

I. SATAN IS THE INSTIGATOR AND PROMOTER OF APOSTASY

1. However, from the very beginning God tells His people that Satan will be utterly overthrown and the rebellion he instituted be done away with. Before it happens, the Lord wants to assure us that it will end in VICTORY for Him and His cause. ".... her seed shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel," Genesis 3: 15. This prophecy, given in the Garden of Eden, is a direct reference to Calvary's victory over Satan at the cost of the Saviour's sufferings and death.

God has decreed that the outworking of the victory would be a slow and progressive process. I recently read of a Chinese man who beheaded a snake in order to make a broth of the snake's flesh. After he prepared the flesh and put it in a cooking utensil, taking some 15-20 minutes to do so, he reached for the head he had cut off to dispose of it, when it bit him! He died of the bite from the decapitated head of a snake even though he had cut off its head some time before. Satan has been wounded unto death in his head but he can still bite and destroy!

2. The Old Testament saint, in anticipation of Christ's victory, enjoyed a measure of victory over Satan. Job illustrates that for us. He could not be touched by the devil without the Lord's permission. Of course, Old Testament believers enjoyed other benefits of Christ's forthcoming victorious death on the cross where he defeated the devil: pardon for sin, assurance of sins forgiven, sanctification and hope of an eternal heaven. Hear Job's wonderful testimony from nigh on 5000 years ago. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me," Job 19:25-27.

3. The New Testament saint, I believe, enjoys a greater measure of victory over Satan. Being better acquainted with the Saviour's victory and more instructed, he is able to plead more effectively that victory against the devil. He is clearly told how to gain the victory over the devil. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," James 4:7. Again, he is told: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil," Ephesians 6:11.

4. The saints in the Millennial reign, will enjoy an even greater degree of victory. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season," Revelation 20: 1-3. The devil is beginning to feel to the full the victory gained over him at the cross. The final phrase of the verse 3, "he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season," indicates that the full and final deliverance from Satan and his power will not be experienced in the Millennial reign of Christ. At its end, there will follow a short period of deception under him when unbelievers will be led by him into one final act of rebellion against God.

5. The full outworking of the bruising of Satan's head at Calvary will come just before the judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne and the bringing in of the new heavens and the new earth. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever," Revelation 20:10.



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

Sinners will see and know that they are about to share the eternal fate of the devil.

This event is immediately followed by the Great White Throne judgment and then thereafter by the new creation. So will be brought to an end the great rebellion which began with the fall of the devil in heaven.

II. THE APOSTASY ALWAYS TAKES THE FORM OF A REJECTION OF GOD'S WORD

The devil first fomented rebellion in the Garden of Eden described in the words: "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die," Genesis 3:4. That is a direct contradicting and rejecting of the plain word of God and a supplanting of it by the devil's lie for it is written: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Genesis 2:16-17. The words were hardly out of the mouth of God before the devil was denying them. Such is at the heart of apostasy.

1. Today, the voices raised in rejection of God's Word are legion. In Parliament, in schools and universities, in churches and theological colleges, the voice of the devil is to be heard still saying: "Yea, hath God said?" Genesis 3:1. It is even heard in pulpits of some fundamentalists where the plain teaching of Bible prophecy is rejected!

2. The rejection of God's Word today has led to the establishing of an utterly lawless and deviant society. The apostasy has changed our nation in a generation as it has never been changed before. Institutions once charged with advancing holiness and combatting sin have become the chief instruments in Satan's cause. "For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil," Romans 13:3. That is how it was ordained by God. But our rulers have abandoned God's punishment for murder, legalised the murder of the unborn, rejected of God's institution of marriage, prosecuted those who stand for righteousness and honoured those guilty of the vilest of crimes.

This is the fruit of apostasy!

3. The young and the weak, in particular, have suffered as a result of apostasy. Recently, in the English town of Rochester, police officials, welfare workers and others in positions of responsibility have been publicly condemned for their failure to protect young girls targeted and abused by Asian men, oftentimes because they feared being declared 'racists'! Churches of every creed have been guilty of the abuse of children in the most heart-breaking and horrifying circumstances. Recently, a cancer specialist, who treated children, was discovered to have abused many, many of his young patients. (See news report [here](#)).

Under God's Law, the young and the weak are particularly protected.

"For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment," Deuteronomy 10: 17 -18.

"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation," Psalm 68:5.

"The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed," Psalm 103:6.

"Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow," Isaiah 1:17.

How different it is today in the nation that gave rise to charitable institutions, such as those founded by Dr. Barnardo and George Müller, for the caring of the young, the fatherless, the widow and the weak!

III THOUGH LONG HELD IN CHECK BY GOD, THE APOSTASY IS NEARING ITS ZENITH

Paul tells us that the spirit of apostasy, 'the Mystery of Iniquity', has been under the restraint of God, but



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

at a time pleasing to Him that restraint will be lifted. "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," 2 Thess 2:6-7.

There are a number of indications that day of the fulness of apostasy is fast approaching.

1. The events which provoked God's wrath and judgment in the past are re-occurring again today. The blatant questioning of the truth of God's Word, as took place in the Garden of Eden, is happening all around us. Of course, that has been a feature of every age but the difference now is that God's Word is denied not merely by the atheist and sceptic but by those who profess to be God's servants. The dreadful and unspeakable activities of Sodom and Gomorrah are common practice today in the nations of the world. The filthiness of the sodomite is now an acceptable life style. Indeed, it is illegal to call it what it is: an abomination before God that will bring down all who embrace it.

"Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination," Leviticus 18:22.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

The mark of the generation destroyed in the great flood of Noah's day was that of violence. "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," Genesis 6:5, 11.

The word "violence" means "cruel and unjust violence"! This is the first time the word appears in the Scriptures. What violence is daily seen in our streets and homes. Babies are slaughtered, the elderly abused, even in hospitals and care homes!

Can things get much worse?

The sins that brought judgment upon Jerusalem in BC 599 under the Babylonians and again in AD 70, under the Romans, are commonplace today. The sins which brought God's judgment upon former generations are openly indulged in.

OPEN DEFIANCE OF GOD

Jeremiah complained of the defiant wickedness of his generation and shows it to be the cause of its judgment under the Babylonian invasion.

"Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men? Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him that answer, saying, The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

them, and came it not into his mind? So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day. Because ye have burned incense, and because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD, nor walked in his law, nor in his statutes, nor in his testimonies; therefore this evil is happened unto you, as at this day," Jeremiah 44:15-23.

FLOURISHING

Popery flourishes and its idolatry is promoted not just by the Romish Church but by those whose creeds denounce Rome as false and corrupt, such as the Church of England! Such promotion takes place at a time when Providence has been pleased to bring out into the light the utterly vile practices against children by Romanism worldwide.

Surely our land is ripe for judgment!

What Paul says of ages past is equally true of today.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them," Romans 1:22-32.

Could 21st century Britain be painted more accurately than this?

2. The description of events given us in the prophecies of the last times are occurring again all around us. The words of the Saviour are very precise.

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Luke 17:26-30. The activities of the days of Noah and Sodom are being witnessed again amongst men and judgment looms.

CHARACTER OF THE LAST DAYS

The apostle Paul summarises the last days in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

"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



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

thereof; from such turn away.”

When we see mothers murdering their own offspring or abusing and starving them to death through neglect then you have occurrences of what “without natural affection” means.

Each of these 19 sins listed here mark and characterise today’s society. It is moved and motivated by a love of self or selfishness. Parents generally have surrendered their authority to the demands of the child and thanklessness is everywhere manifested. Religion of every form abounds but the preaching of the old gospel with its central truth of the Saviour’s atoning, delivering work at Calvary is almost utterly absent.

3. It is clear that things are getting beyond the control of men. The activities of the Islamic ‘ISIS’ organisation in the Middle East and the recent Israel - Gaza crisis, which will occur again without a shadow of a doubt, the lawlessness on the streets of our nation illustrate this. The leaders of men are beside themselves to stop these activities.

The campaign to break up the United Kingdom which resulted in the recent referendum in Scotland, a large portion of which desires to be independent. The United Kingdom was formed as a result of the unifying influences of the Protestant Reformation. The decline of those influences is seen in the dissolving of the ties within the UK.

The events in the wake of the Scottish “NO” vote have indicated that more confusion, division and self-promotion are yet to be seen in our nation. English and Welsh voices are raised with demands for greater autonomy, while Irish Republicanism sees the Scottish vote as further impetus to their campaign for a United Ireland and the destruction of Northern Ireland.

All of this illustrates a nation and a people in chaos and fits the description of the state of the nations prior to the Lord’s return as given in Psalm 2.

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure,” Psalm 2:1-5.

The inevitable harvest of the worldwide apostasy draws nigh. Be on your guard!