

The Great Apostasy

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The apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians, foretold the great apostasy which would result in the establishment of the papal power. He declared that the day of Christ should 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, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4). And furthermore, the apostle warns his brethren that "the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Even at that early date he saw, creeping into the church, errors that would prepare the way for the development of the papacy.

Little by little, at first in stealth and silence, and then more openly as it increased in strength and gained control of the minds of men, the mystery of iniquity carried forward its deceptive and blasphemous work. Almost imperceptibly the customs of heathenism found their way into the Christian church. The spirit of compromise and conformity was restrained for a time by the fierce persecutions which the church endured under paganism. But as persecution ceased, and Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions. **The nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century,**

caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Now the work of corruption rapidly progressed. Paganism, while appearing to be vanquished, became the conqueror. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, ceremonies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ.

The Man of Sin

This compromise between paganism and Christianity resulted in the development of the "man of sin" foretold in prophecy as opposing and exalting himself above God. That gigantic system of false religion is a masterpiece of Satan's power,—a monument of his efforts to seat himself upon the throne to rule the earth according to his will.

Change Times and Laws

The detector of error having been removed, Satan worked according to his will. Prophecy had declared that the papacy was to "think to change times and laws" (Dan. 7:25). This work was not slow to attempt. To afford converts from heathenism a substitute for the worship of idols, and thus to promote their nominal acceptance of Christianity, the adoration of images and relics was gradually introduced into the Christian worship. The decree of a general council [Second Council of Nice, A.D. 787] finally established this system of idolatry. To complete the sacrilegious work, Rome presumed to expunge from the law of God the second commandment, forbidding image worship, and to divide the tenth commandment, in order to preserve the number.

The spirit of concession to paganism opened the way for a still further disregard of Heaven's authority. Satan tampered with the fourth Commandment also, and essayed to set aside the ancient Sabbath, the day which God had blessed and sanctified (Gen. 2:2-3), and in its stead to exalt the festival observed by the heathen as "the venerable day of the sun." This change was not at first attempted openly. In the first centuries the true Sabbath had been kept by all Christians. They were jealous for the honor of God and, believing that His law is immutable, they zealously guarded the sacredness of its precepts. But with great subtlety, Satan worked through his agents to bring about his object. **That the attention of the people might be called to the Sunday, it was made a festival in honor of the resurrection of Christ.** Religious services were held upon it; yet it was regarded as a day of recreation, the Sabbath being still sacredly observed.

To prepare the way for the work which he designed to accomplish, Satan had led the Jews, before the advent of Christ, to load down the Sabbath with the most rigorous exactions, making its observance a burden. Now, taking advantage of the false light in which he had thus caused it to be regarded, he cast contempt upon it as a Jewish institution. While Christians continued to observe the Sunday as a joyous festival, he led them, in order to show their hatred of Judaism, to make the Sabbath a fast, a day of sadness and gloom.

The Day of the Sun

In the early part of the fourth century, the emperor Constantine

issued a decree making Sunday a public festival throughout the Roman Empire. The day of the sun was revered by his pagan subjects, and was honored by Christians; **it was the emperor's policy to unite the conflicting interests of heathenism and Christianity. He was urged to do this by the bishops of the church, who, inspired by ambition and thirst for power, perceived that if the same day was observed by both Christians and the heathen, it would promote the nominal acceptance of Christianity by pagans and thus advance the power and glory of the church.** But while Christians were gradually led to regard Sunday as possessing a degree of sacredness, they still held the true Sabbath as the holy of the Lord, and observed it in obedience to the fourth commandment.

The Commandments of Men

The arch-deceiver had not completed his work. He was resolved to gather the Christian world under his banner and to exercise his power through his vicegerent, the proud pontiff who claimed to be the representative of Christ. Through half-converted pagans, ambitious prelates, and world-loving churchmen, he accomplished his purpose. Vast councils were held from time to time, in which the dignitaries of the church were convened from all the world. In nearly every council the Sabbath which God had instituted was pressed down a little lower while the Sunday was correspondingly exalted. **Thus the pagan festival came finally to be honored as a divine institution while the Bible Sabbath was pronounced a relic of Judaism and its observers were declared to be accursed.**

The great apostate had succeeded in exalting himself "above all that is called God, or that is worshiped" (*2 Thess. 2:4*). He had dared to change the only precept of the divine law that unmistakably

points all mankind to the true and living God. **In the fourth commandment, God is revealed as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and is thereby distinguished from all false gods.** It was as a memorial of the work of creation that the seventh day was sanctified as a rest day for man. It was designed to keep the living God ever before the minds of men as the source of being and the object of reverence and worship. **Satan strives to turn men from their allegiance to God and from rendering obedience to His law; therefore he directs his efforts especially against that commandment which points to God as the Creator.**

Child of the Papacy

Protestants now urge that the resurrection of Christ on Sunday made it the Christian Sabbath. But Scripture evidence is lacking. No such honor was given to the day by Christ or His apostles. The observance of Sunday as a Christian institution had its origin in that "mystery of lawlessness" (*2 Thess. 2:7, R.V.*), which even in Paul's day, had begun its work. Where and when did the Lord adopt this child of the papacy? What valid reason can be given for a change which the Scriptures do not sanction?

Papal Supremacy

In the sixth century the papacy had become firmly established. Its seat of power was fixed in the imperial city, and the bishop of Rome was declared to be the head over the entire church. **Paganism had given place to the papacy. The dragon had given to the beast "his power, and his seat, and great authority" (*Rev. 13:2*).** And now began the 1260 years of papal oppression foretold in the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation (*Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:5-7*). Christians were forced to choose, either to yield their integrity and accept the papal ceremonies and worship or to wear away their lives

in dungeons or suffer death by the rack, the fagot, or the headsman's ax. Now were fulfilled the words of Jesus, "Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake" (*Luke 21:16-17*). **Persecution opened upon the faithful with greater fury than ever before, and the world became a vast battlefield.** For hundreds of years the church of Christ found refuge in seclusion and obscurity. Thus says the prophet: "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." *Revelation 12:6*.

The Dark Ages

The accession of the Roman Church to power marked the beginning of the Dark Ages. As her power increased, the darkness deepened. Faith was transferred from Christ, the true foundation, to the pope of Rome. Instead of trusting in the Son of God for forgiveness of sins and for eternal salvation, the people looked to the pope and to the priests and prelates to whom he delegated authority. **They were taught that the pope was their earthly mediator, and that none could approach God except through him;** and, further, that he stood in the place of God to them, and was therefore to be implicitly obeyed. A deviation from his requirements was sufficient cause for the severest punishment to be visited upon the bodies and souls of the offenders. **Thus the minds of the people were turned away from God to fallible, erring, and cruel men; nay more, to the prince of darkness himself, who exercised his power through them.** Sin was disguised in a garb of sanctity. When the Scriptures are suppressed, and man comes to regard himself as supreme, we need look

only for fraud, deception, and debasing iniquity. With the elevation of human laws and traditions was manifest the corruption that ever results from setting aside the law of God.

Flight into the Wilderness

Among the leading causes that had led to the separation of the true church from Rome was the hatred of the latter toward the Bible Sabbath. As foretold by prophecy, the papal power cast down the truth to the ground. The law of God was trampled in the dust while the traditions and customs of men were exalted. The churches that were under the rule of the papacy were early compelled to honor the Sunday as a holy day. Amid the prevailing error and superstition, many, even of the true people of God, became so bewildered that while they observed the Sabbath they refrained from labor also on the Sunday. But this did not satisfy the papal leaders. They demanded not only that Sunday be hallowed, but that the Sabbath be profaned; and they denounced in the strongest language those who dared to show it honor. **It was only by fleeing from the power of Rome that any could obey God's law in peace.**

In Lands Beyond

In lands beyond the jurisdiction of Rome, there existed for many centuries bodies of Christians who remained almost wholly free from papal corruption. They were surrounded by heathenism, and in the lapse of ages were affected by its errors; but they continued to regard the Bible as the only rule of faith, and adhered to many of its truths. **These Christians believed in the perpetuity of the law of God and observed the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.** Churches that held to this faith and practice existed in Central Africa and among the Armenians of Asia.

The Waldenses

But of those who resisted the encroachments of the papal power, the Waldenses stood foremost. In the very land where popery had fixed its seat, there its falsehood and corruption were most steadfastly resisted . . . The persecutions visited for many centuries upon this God-fearing people were endured by them with a patience and constancy that honored their Redeemer. Notwithstanding the crusades against them, and the inhuman butchery to which they were subjected, they continued to send out their missionaries to scatter the precious truth. They were hunted to the death; yet their blood watered the seed sown, and it failed not of yielding fruit. Thus the Waldenses witnessed for God, centuries before the birth of Luther. Scattered over many lands, they planted the seeds of the Reformation that began in the time of Wycliffe, grew broad and deep in the days of Luther, and is to be carried forward to the close of time by those who also are willing to suffer all things for "the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (*Rev. 1:9*).

The Reformation Continues

The Reformation did not, as many suppose, end with Luther. It is to be continued to the close of this world's history. Luther had a great work to do in reflecting to others the light which God had permitted to shine upon him; yet he did not receive all the light which was to be given to the world. **From that time to this, new light has been continually shining upon the Scriptures, and new truths have been constantly unfolding.**

Bridging the Chasm

The English Reformers, while renouncing the doctrines of Romanism, had retained many of its forms. Thus though the authority and the creed of Rome were rejected, not a few of her customs and ceremonies were incorporated into the worship of the Church of En-

gland. It was claimed that these things were not matters of conscience, that though they were not commanded in Scripture, and hence were nonessential, yet not being forbidden, they were not intrinsically evil. Their observance tended to narrow the gulf which separated the Reformed churches from Rome, and it was urged that they would promote the acceptance of the Protestant faith by Romanists. To the conservative and compromising, these arguments seemed conclusive. But there was another class that did not so judge. **The fact that these customs tended to bridge the chasm between Rome and the Reformation was in their view a conclusive argument against retaining them.** They looked upon them as badges of the slavery from which they had been delivered, and to which they had no disposition to return. **They reasoned that God has in His Word established the regulations governing His worship, and that men are not at liberty to add to these or to detract from them.** The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what He had explicitly enjoined.

Sealing the Law

The work of Sabbath reform to be accomplished in the last days is foretold in the prophecy of Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil." "The sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord . . . to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant; even

them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer." *Isaiah 56:1-2, 6-7.*

These words apply in the Christian age, as is shown by the context: "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him." *Isaiah 56:8.* Here is foreshadowed the gathering in of the Gentiles by the gospel. And upon those who then honor the Sabbath, a blessing is pronounced. Thus the obligation of the fourth commandment extends past the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, to the time when His servants should preach to all nations the message of glad tidings.

The Lord commands by the same prophet, "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among My disciples" (*Isa. 8:16*). **The seal of God's law is found in the fourth commandment. This only, of all the ten, brings to view both the name and the title of the Law-giver. It declares Him to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and thus shows His claim to reverence and worship above all others.** Aside from this precept, there is nothing in the decalogue to show by whose authority the law is given. **When the Sabbath was changed by the papal power, the seal was taken from the law.** The disciples of Jesus are called upon to restore it, by exalting the Sabbath of the fourth commandment to its rightful position as the Creator's memorial and the sign of His authority.

"To the law and to the testi-

mony." While conflicting doctrines and theories abound, **the law of God is the one unerring rule by which all opinions, doctrines, and theories are to be tested.** Says the prophet, "If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (*Isa. 8:20*).

The prophet thus points out the ordinance which has been forsaken: "Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord." *Isaiah 58:12-14.* This prophecy also applies in our time. **The breach was made in the law of God when the Sabbath was changed by the Roman power. But the time has come for that divine institution to be restored.** The breach is to be repaired, and the foundation of many generations to be raised up.

Hallowed by the Creator's rest and blessing, **the Sabbath was kept by Adam in his innocence in holy Eden; by Adam, fallen yet repentant, when he was driven from his happy estate. It was kept by all the patriarchs, from Abel to righteous Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob.** When the chosen people were in bondage in Egypt, many, in the midst of prevailing idolatry, lost their knowledge of God's law; but when the Lord delivered Israel, He

proclaimed His law in awful grandeur to the assembled multitude, that they might know His will, and fear and obey Him forever.

From that day to the present, the knowledge of God's law has been preserved in the earth, and the Sabbath of the fourth commandment has been kept. Though the "man of sin" succeeded in trampling underfoot God's holy day, yet even in the period of his supremacy there were, hidden in secret places, faithful souls who paid it honor. **Since the Reformation, there have been some in every generation to maintain its observance.** Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath.

Truth Is Older than Error

Many urged that Sundaykeeping had been an established doctrine and a widespread custom of the church for many centuries. Against this argument it was shown that the Sabbath and its observance were more ancient and widespread, even as old as the world itself, and bearing the sanction both of angels and of God. When the foundations of the earth were laid, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, then was laid the foundation of the Sabbath (*Job 38:6-7; Gen. 2:1-3*). Well may this institution demand our reverence: it was ordained by no human authority, and rests upon no human traditions; it was established by the Ancient of days, and commanded by His eternal Word.

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