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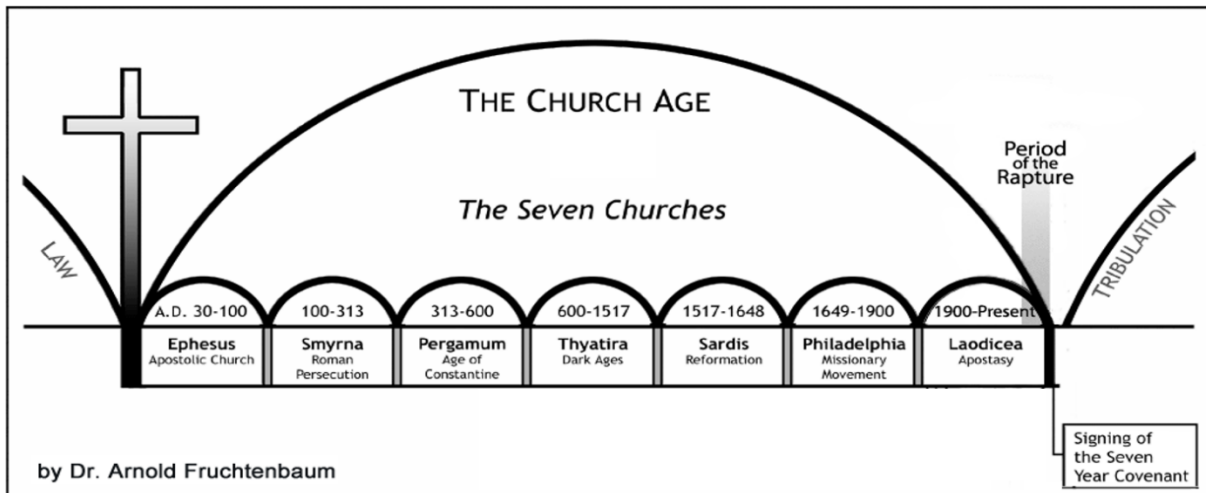
2026 Brave New Year: Deception and the Last Days, Part 3: The Great Falling Away of the Church

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Introduction

- 1) Good morning, Church! So, we’re continuing our little New Years’ mini-series called, *2023 Brave New Year: Deception and the Last Days*. We’ve looked at the way AI has moved into our world and has already carefully shaped it, and even how it’s beginning to shape the Church. We also saw that, according to God’s Word, *deception* will be the most prominent spirit trend of the Last Days.

- 2) Now, the Seven Letters of Jesus Christ to the Churches in Asia Minor (found in **Revelation 2 & 3**) make up a kind of time line for the two-thousand-year history of the Church.



I have taught this idea in detail in our Revelation series, but, in a nutshell, the Letter to the Church at Ephesus (**Revelation 2:1-7**) represents *the beginning* of the Church Age and the Letter to the Church at Laodicea (**Revelation 3:14-22**) *culminates* it.

The age just prior to the Laodicean Period was a time of rich missionary work. It is represented by the Letter to the Church at Philadelphia (**Revelation 3:7-13**). But The Laodicean Church is a corrupt, unsaved Church.

To the Persecuted Church, Smyrna (**Revelation 2:8-11**), Jesus said, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)” (**2:9a**). But to the last Church, Laodicea, He said, “You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (**3:17**).

CHURCH	HISTORIC PERIOD
Ephesus	The Apostolic Age
Smyrna	The post-apostolic era of persecution
Pergamum	The Catholic era, during which the priesthood developed
Thyatira	The Dark Ages
Sardis	The Reformation
Philadelphia	The “true church” of every age
Laodicea	The “lukewarm” church of the 20 th century

In each of the first six letters in **Revelation 2** and **3**, Jesus has something to commend the Church for. But to the Letter to the Church at Laodicea, He has nothing to commend. They are a corrupt, deceived Church. Listen to His words to them:

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

¹⁸ I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ The one

who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (**Revelation 3:14-22**)

The Laodicean Church will not be raptured; it is unsaved. *Those who are raptured at the end of the Laodicean Era are actually the remnant of the Philadelphian Period.*

Today, we find ourselves smack dab in the Laodicean Period of Church history, *the last Period*. This, I believe, is a biblical indication of where we are in God’s prophetic timetable – and it completely rhymes with the Great Falling Away of the Church that Paul predicted, the ἀποστασία which we’ll continue studying this morning (**2 Thessalonians 2:3**).

- 3) Also, I would remind you quickly of the Seven-Day concept of human history which I have also taught any number of times and in detail.

Here’s the idea in a nutshell:

God made the earth in 6 days and rested on the seventh.

This established a divine pattern for human history.

Prophetically, the Apostle Peter tells us that “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (**2 Peter 3:8**).

Therefore, *God’s plan for the human race includes seven 1000-year ‘days.’*

The last ‘day’ – the Seventh Day – will be a ‘day of Sabbath rest – it will be a time of perfect peace and joy when Jesus will reign on the earth and sin and Satan will lose their power.

Interestingly enough, Scripture tells us that Jesus will reign upon the earth for *precisely* 1000 years (or one prophetic day). Those of us who see this as a biblical pattern of prophetic truth, believe that God established the Sabbath to point to this coming Seventh Day.

Colossians 2:16-17 tells us that the “Sabbath” is a “shadow of the things to come.” The Sabbath will be fulfilled by Christ when He reigns at last over His

1000-year Kingdom. That is why Jesus called Himself the “Lord of the Sabbath” (**Matthew 12:8**, **Mark 2:28**, and **Luke 6:5**). It is in earth’s Seventh Day, the true Sabbath, that the earth will finally rest from sin and Satan’s influence (he’ll be locked up for the 1000 years).

Now, I believe that this is exactly what the Bible teaches about God’s prophetic timetable. It’s a teaching that goes at least as far back as the *Epistle of Barnabas* (written between AD 70 and 132 AD).¹

In fact, I believe that the Cosmic Week theory is one of the *most significant* REAL biblical indicators of where we stand today in God’s prophetic timetable – and those of you who know me know that I’m not given to novelty or fanciful interpretations of the Sacred Text!

Again, I say all of this to give us a sense of where we stand today at this moment in the history of the Church.

- 4) The Bible, as it turns out, has a lot to say about deception. One of the most troubling effects of the emergence of AI is that *truth* is becoming harder and harder to discover.

Jesus said, “I am the way the truth and the life” (**John 14:6**).

But what happens when truth becomes so blurred that you can't tell straight up from down anymore?

¹ *The Epistle of Barnabas* (written between AD 70 and 132 AD) says:

“It is written concerning the Sabbath in the Decalogue which [the Lord] spoke, face to face, to Moses on Mount Sinai, “And you shall sanctify the Sabbath of the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart.” And He says in another place, “If my sons keep the Sabbath, then will I cause my mercy to rest upon them.” The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation [like this]: “And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.” Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, “He finished in six days.” This implies that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years ... Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. “And He rested on the seventh day.” This means: when His Son, coming [again], shall destroy the time of the wicked man [that is, the Antichrist], and judge the ungodly ... then shall He truly rest on the seventh day.”

Now, the Apostle John was still most likely still alive when this was written, that’s how early it is. It demonstrates that early Christians believed that after 6,000 years of human history, Jesus would reign over a literal 1000-year Kingdom.

And this blurring of the truth is the precise strategy of the enemy of our souls! The Bible is clear that Satan will use deception vigorously, especially in the Last Days.

✠ In **Revelation 12:9**, God’s great enemy is called “Satan, the deceiver of the whole world”. That’s the divinely-appointed descriptor that the Holy Spirit used of him!

And so, the Bible promises that the satanic strategy of *deception* will shift into turbo-drive in the last days.

✠ Paul warned in **2 Timothy 3:13** warns that “evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

✠ And John warned that, even in his day, “many deceivers [had] gone out into the world” (**2 John 7**).

The Great Falling Away, Redux

1) Now, what is true *in general* about the pervasiveness of deception in the Last Days will be profoundly embodied in the person of the Antichrist.

Jesus and Paul and John predicted His coming. He goes by many titles in Scripture: The Man of Sin, The Son of Perdition, The Lawless One, The Beast, The Bloody and Deceitful Man, The Wicked One, The Adversary, The Little Horn, The Prince That Shall Come and The Willful King.

Arthur Pink identified 25 names and titles of the coming Antichrist; none of them are good!²

Last time we looked *quickly* at Paul’s prophecy about the coming of this Lawless One. We saw that the great prerequisite for the emergence of the Antichrist – one prophetic event the Church will actually see – is *THE apostasy* [ἡ ἀποστασία] or *THE* [ἡ] *great falling away* [ἀποστασία] of the Church.

I believe this predicted prerequisite for the emergence of the Antichrist is taking place right now, right before our very eyes. I want to circle back

² Pink, Arthur Walkington, *The Antichrist* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 1923, 2005), p. 59ff.

around a bit on this important theme this morning because I'm not at all satisfied with how I covered it last time. This is vital for us to understand: before the *great deceiver* appears, the Church (as Paul promised in **2 Thessalonians 2:3**) will be lured away in large measure from true devotion to Jesus.

And so, Paul expressed his concern for the Church, writing, "I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (**2 Corinthians 11:3**). Can a blood-bought, born-again follower of Jesus be "deceived" and "led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ"? You bet your boots he can! And not only CAN that happen, it WILL happen *en masse* in the Last Days.

- 2) It's surprising for some (but not to students of Church history or to careful readers of the New Testament) to learn that *the coming of the Antichrist was a topic of great concern for believers in the early Church*.

In Paul's day (51-52 A.D.), some thought he'd *already appeared*. He hadn't. Some heard he'd come from letters claiming to be from one of the Apostles, but those letters were forgeries.

One hot bed of misinformation about the timing of the Antichrist's appearance was the Church at ancient Thessaloniki. So, to set the record straight, Paul wrote them a letter – his second one to them. The second chapter of that letter is most pertinent to our study this morning. Paul wrote:

"Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion [**ἡ ἀποστασία**] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

⁶ And you know what is restraining him [the Antichrist] now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work [in the 1st century!]. Only he [the Holy Spirit] who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way [when those who are the very Temple of the Holy Spirit ascend at that Rapture].

⁸ And THEN [*after* the Rapture, when the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is taken “out of the way”] the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming” (**2 Thess. 2:1-8**, brackets mine).

3) Now, please notice: *even in the Apostolic Era* deception was at work within the Church. So Paul had to warn the Thessalonians not to be “shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord [had] come” (**2:2**).

Do you see that? Deceptions were circulating in various ways in Paul’s day:

- (1) Through spirits [demonic entities], and
- (2) Through people speaking false words, and even
- (3) Through letters claiming to be from one of the Apostles (**2 Thess. 2:2**).

Paul went on to warn them, “Let no one deceive you in any way” (**2:3**).

Why? Because the threats were many, the stakes were high, and the potential for being misled was great! This was in the 1st century! We’re now in the 21st century, and closer than ever to the end of all things.

Furthermore, these believers were in danger of being deceived *about things that Paul had taught them over and over again!* He wrote: “Do you not remember that when I was still with you, *I told you these things?*” (**2 Thessalonians 2:5**)

In another place, Paul warned of teachers who will lead people astray.

✠ They pose as Christians, but “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery ... [they] deceive the hearts of the naïve” (**Romans 16:18**).

- 4) Paul (and others) warned against teachers who would downplay God’s fury over sin.

This despite the fact that **Romans 1:18-19** says, “the wrath of God [ὀργή θεοῦ] is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”

The “wrath” of God here [ὀργή θεοῦ] translates the Greek word ὀργή – an *anger or indignation which carries a strong emotional component*.³ Our English word *wrath* captures it pretty well.

And so, Paul warned about teachers who would be soft on sin. Why because *sin must be properly defined if it’s to be repented of!*

✠ **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

✠ Then he continues, especially focusing in on *sexual* sins, probably because these would be the clearest marks of apostasy *within the Church* as Church history marched on:

“The body is not meant for sexual immorality,” he wrote, “but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body ... ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God [he’s clearly speaking to BELIEVERS]? [Notice: he’s speaking exclusively to believers!] You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body” (**1 Corinthians 6:13b, 18-20**, brackets mine).

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 720.

✠ Therefore, he warned the believers at Ephesus: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” (**Ephesians 5:6**).

Closing

1) In closing, I wonder if it’s time to stand for Jesus and against the world? This quote is attributed to Martin Luther:

“If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Word of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Him. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved.”

Amen! Believers today have to be bold and speak the truth in love to a world that needs to know the Lord.

2) I’ll leave you with a clip from a longer speech by the Rev. Calvin Robinson. It was recorded a few years back when the Church of England was considering sanctioning homosexual marriages.⁴

I think his words communicate what I’ve been trying to say in this message. Here’s the transcript:

“We are directly talking about undermining God's plan as he has revealed it to us. We're replacing his authority with our own. If marriage is no longer between one man and one woman, are we open to the idea of polygamy? We disregard the heterosexual aspect, so why not the monogamous aspect too? If love is love, as we keep hearing, who is to say that three men loving each other is not more love than two men loving each other?

And I'm sure someone in this chamber has echoed the words love is love tonight. And this is not about love being love. This is about marriage, the sacrament of holy matrimony. It is directly connected to love, but it's not the definition of love. Too many people utter those words and confuse the

⁴ Watch the full speech in the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMbTb2HS5Rc>

meaning of love. Agape, the biblical context of love, is a divine love. It's a sacrificial love. It's not lustful. People often conflate sex with love. It's very disingenuous. We heard quite a bit of that. But then, of course, atheists often pirate the words God is love. And we've heard that one tonight, too. Again, without any understanding. Yes, God is love, but he sets the terms, not us.

Another [word] we've heard plenty of is inclusivity. Should the Church be more inclusive? Again, it's a play of words. It's virtue signaling it's to appear good rather than to be good. The Church should absolutely be inclusive. Christ spent time with tax collectors and prostitutes, but it is *they* who went away changed, *not Christ*. We are fallen. Therefore, we are all sinners. The Church is open to sinners. Of course it is. That's the purpose of the Church. But it should not be to encourage people to continue to sin.

Our duty as clerics is to help lead people to Christ, to lead them away from sin, not to embrace it, not to affirm it. I know many LGBT people who live lives in Christ. They abstain from sexual gratification to be closer to God. And it's not easy. It really isn't. It's perhaps not fair, but it is right and it is good. And these people are being let down. I've had people crying, saying, 'I could have got married, but I did what the Church taught me was right. And now the Church is saying they were wrong all along. I've wasted my life.'

As Christians, we're called to be in the world, but not of the world. In the secular world, we already have equality in law. People can enter civil partnerships or even gay marriage outside of the Church, and that's their prerogative. However, the faith is inherently discriminatory. God is discriminatory. He sets conditions on us entering his heavenly kingdom. It is not a free for all. We must turn away from sin, repent and follow Christ. And I want to specify it is the sin that is the problem, not the sinner. Every single person is loved by God and God forgives all of us of our depravity, but we have to turn away from our sins and turn toward Him. And it seems the panel opposite me has forgotten to separate the sin from the sinner. One can denounce sin while still welcoming the sinner.

So, as I wrap up, my message to the proposing side is do not lead us astray. Do not lead people astray. Do not be the wolves in sheep's clothing. Do not be the false teachers that the Bible warns us about. Remember your obligation to defend the faith. Stop teaching about diversity, inclusion and equality and get back to teaching about redemption and salvation.

This is spiritual neglect. Help people by telling them the truth. Be kind to people by supporting them through those struggles and reminding them that Christ suffers with them. And be compassionate by leading them to Christ when the world tries to lead them away from Him. The Church is imploding and the faithful masses have stopped turning up on Sundays and we are seeing the most rapid decline of Christianity in this country that we may have ever seen. Do not accelerate it with heresy.

You *do not* have the authority to bless sin. When I hear the Bishop of London on record saying these new prayers will mean priests can bless same sex relationships, some of which may be sexual in nature, I hear the devil at work. Bishops are promoting the idea of sacrifice, sacramental sodomy. Let them be anathema. Repent. And to the rest of you, I have no doubt that some of you will consider me a bigot or a transphobe or a homophobe. But I am neither of those things. None of those things. I'm simply a follower of Christ, a Christian. And we are naturally countercultural.

And if so-called liberals were truly diverse and tolerant, they would embrace us just as they embrace everyone else. And the point has been made. But the growing Christophobic attitude around this public debate and the ugly level of hypocrisy is that we really see people hold Muslims and people of other faiths to the same expectations that they hold Christians to. Who is calling for the Quran to be updated to modern societal norms? The same patronizing attitude of people of other that treat other faiths, patronize other faiths while being intolerant towards Christians at the same time.

It's a shame, but in the words of St. Athanasius of Alexandria, “If the world is against the truth, then I am against the world.”

Indeed! As the Beloved Apostle wrote:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).