

## ***A LOVE OF THE TRUTH***

Those of you who were in our mid-week Bible Study Wednesday evening will recall our discussion about the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of 2 Thessalonians. You may recall that I shared with the class that brother Raymond Kelcy, one of the great scholars of our time (now deceased) wrote in his commentary on these Thessalonian letters that the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of 2 Thessalonians is one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible to understand.

The reasons why this chapter is so difficult is because of what Paul writes about the “man of sin” or as your version may put it, the “man of lawlessness. You may remember from your reading or our discussion that Paul was writing because somehow these Thessalonian Christians had gotten the idea that the Lord had already come and they had missed it. Paul reminds them of the things he had taught them when he was with them in Thessalonica, maybe a year before.

In essence he says that they haven’t missed the second coming of Christ and that Christ will not return before a couple of things happen first. One had to do with what he called “the rebellion,” or “the falling away,” or “apostasy.” The other thing was that the man of sin, or “the man of lawlessness” would be revealed, would make his appearance. He also mentioned that someone, or something, was keeping that latter thing from happening. This was in order that he not be revealed before his time. But, whatever that was—whether a person or force of some kind—it was going to be taken out of the way. That is, that restraining influence would be removed and the man of sin would then be free to be revealed. He said all of that would happen before Christ comes back the second time, and when he returns then the man of sin would be slain with the breath of his mouth and all of his works brought to naught.

Now, I submit to you that those matters make this a pretty difficult chapter to understand. We would like to know more about this man of sin, or as I prefer, this man of lawlessness. It seems as if Paul at least allowed for the possibility that the appearance of that being or force, would come fairly soon, possibly even in Paul’s lifetime, or shortly thereafter. However, since this being or force would be destroyed at Christ’s second coming, it kind of rules out the possibility that the man of sin was a human being, seeing as how he would be nearing his 2000<sup>th</sup> birthday! We know that whoever or whatever it was, or is, that it wasn’t Satan himself, because **verse 9** says that his coming will be in accordance with the work of Satan, so if his work is in accordance with the working of Satan, he can’t be Satan.

Some people believe this is a reference to the antichrist but that doesn’t seem to fit either because John tells us that in his day, “*many antichrists have come,*” (1 John 2:18)

Well, we could speculate all day about who this man of sin, or man of lawlessness was, or is; and we could just as easily spend all day trying to figure out who or what it was that was restraining the man of sin at the time Paul was writing. We won’t be able to resolve that issue in this lesson today, but that’s all right because what I really want to talk with you about is something that Paul wrote in **verses 10-12** that is even more frightening to me than anything about the man of sin. After saying that the coming of the man of sin would be in accordance with the working of Satan, Paul goes on to say that his work would be

*“...with all power and false signs and wonders, 10) and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11) Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*

Notice Paul says some people are going to be sent “a strong delusion.” Now, it actually says that God will send some people a strong delusion, and I want to deal with that briefly because I know for many of you, that is a little hard to understand. How can God send a strong delusion upon people? Brother Wayne Jackson gives us a little help on this by reminding us that this is a “common biblical idiom” in which an “active voice” is put in the place of the passive voice. Voice in the Greek language was the way that the Greeks expressed how an action took place; whether it was something the subject of the sentence was doing, or having done to him. The first voice is called active, and the second voice is passive. So in the present verse—2 Thessalonians 2:11, for the sake of emphasis, the voice was changed from passive to active. The reality is that nothing happens in the universe apart from God’s will. His will can be active, meaning he actively wills something to happen, or His will can be passive, meaning that He permits something to happen. That is what brother Jackson is saying was taking place here in this passage. God’s sovereign will permitted a strong delusion to be sent to a person, but for the sake of bringing home the point, it is said, as an idiom of speech, that God sends the delusion.

God of course cannot and does not send anyone a delusion. A delusion is a lie, a falsehood, and both Titus 1:2, and Hebrews 6:18 make it clear that God does not lie. He is holy, and John tells us that *“in Him there is no darkness at all,”* (1 John 1:5). However, he does allow lies to be told. He may have allowed some of you to do that very thing just this week. I hope not, but when it happens, it happens because God permits it.

The lie, of course, is what Paul mentioned there in **verse 9**, where the working of the man of sin was in accordance with the working of Satan, with all *“power, false signs and wonders, and wicked deception.”* So it is Satan’s work that results in a strong delusion, but notice who is targeted by that—Paul says, *“Those who are perishing.”*

We might wonder, why would Satan do that? Why would he waste his bullets so to speak? If the people who are sent these strong delusions are already people who are perishing, why send them yet another lie? The answer to that question is because while they may be perishing, there is something called the truth that could change that. In **John 8:32**, Jesus said, *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”* In **John 17:17**, Jesus declared that God’s word is truth. In another passage—**John 14:6**, Jesus said he was the truth, so he who is the truth came into this world to make known the truth—the truth about God, the truth about sin, the truth about truth, the truth about judgment and eternity, the truth about heaven and hell. He also came to make know the truth about how to be saved, how to be forgiven of one’s sins. His coming, his death, burial and resurrection resulted in what is known as the gospel of Jesus Christ, which before he ascended back to the Father in heaven, Jesus commanded his apostles to take

into all of the world and proclaim to every creature. That is why Satan works overtime to make sure that those who are perishing stay that way. In **2 Corinthians 4:4**, Paul wrote:

*“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4) In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

I want you to look again at **verses 9-12 of 2 Thessalonians 2**. Speaking about that man of sin, whose coming was in accordance with the working of Satan, Paul goes on to say that it would

*“...with all power and false signs and wonders, 10) and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11) Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12) in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*

Let's think for a moment, why are the perishing, perishing? Naturally, they are perishing because of sin. Sin is a transgression of God's law, which was true in the Patriarchal age, it was true in the Mosaic age, and it is just as true in the Christian age. We are not under the Law of Moses, nor are we under any system of law. **John 1:17** tells us that the Law came through Moses, but grace and truth through Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean, however, that God has not given us commandments and rules that we are to live by. There is and the New Testament makes that very plain. In **Galatians 6:2**, Paul calls it *“the law of Christ.”* In **Romans 8:2** he calls it *“the law of the Spirit of life.”* **James 1:25** calls it *“the perfect law of liberty.”* And in **John 14:15**, Jesus said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

So sin is a transgression of the will of God. One can transgress God's will in one of two ways: One, by doing things that God does not want you to do, and two, by failing to do the things that He does want you to do. We call it the sins of commission, and of omission. In either case, as **Romans 6:23** teaches, the wages of sin is death, and that is why people throughout the world are perishing, because they are sinning. They are doing things they ought not to do, and they are failing to do things they should do.

But look closer at **verse 10**, where Paul tells us that those who are perishing are those who *“received not a love for the truth.”* The ESV renders that, *“because they refused to love the truth.”*

Here we find what lies behind much of the sinning in people's lives. People do not have a love for the truth. The truth, any truth, but especially the truth of God's Word and Christ's gospel has too low of a priority to them and in many cases, it has no priority.

Paul said those who do not have a love for the truth are in trouble; they are perishing. Why are they perishing? They are perishing because of sin, and because they have no desire to know or obey the truth, they are blinded to the message of the gospel.

And so this morning, I ask you; you who have come to this house of worship: “Do you love the truth?” “How much of a priority is it in your life?” Do you have the attitude that Solomon expressed to his sons in **Proverbs 23:23**: *“Buy the truth and sell it not?”* Are we like David, who wrote in **Psalm 119:72**, *“The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver,”* or again in verses 127, 128: *“Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. 128) Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.”*

Do you have a love of the truth? Think about it!

- Is truth important to you?
- Are you a man or woman of truth, or do you tell that little white lie every once in awhile? (Have you forgotten the admonishment in **Revelation 21:8**, that *“all liars will have their part in the lake of fire?”*)
- Are you seeking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?
- And are you seeking it in that which is the truth, God’s Word?
- Are you? Would those who know you best, those you live with, and those who are around you a lot, would they say you are a student of the Word?
- Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, or do you have to frankly admit that you haven’t really read or studied the Bible in years? So many Christians are like that.
- Do you habitually neglect the opportunities to study the truth? You know, every week the church offers several different opportunities to get into the Word of God, to read and study what God says. For too many of you, those opportunities are being wasted, so ask yourself again, “Do I really have a love of the truth?”
- Are you obeying the truth? In **Romans 2:6-8**, Paul wrote: God *“...will render to each one according to his works: 7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8) but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”*

So many people today are like that. They are “self-seeking” and they do not obey the truth. The truth does not matter to them.

Ask most people today what they are looking for in a church, and of course, most people are not looking for a church at all. But those that are, ask them what they are looking for, and their answers will be along the lines of, “I’m looking for a church that is exciting,” or “I’m looking for a church that meets my needs,” (is that self-seeking or what!). I heard of one family that said they were looking for a church that had something for their children, (they need to go to the Y!).

How many people today are looking for a church that places a priority on the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Let me tell you folks, even if the church you find is tremendously exciting, if it is not the truth that excites you, you are probably being deceived. Even if the church you find meets every one of your needs, if one of your needs is not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, then you could be in real trouble one of these days. Why? Because those who do not have a love of the truth Satan is going to continue to deceive until it will be almost impossible for them to know and obey the truth, and that is the sad truth.

The truth is, most people today do not want to hear and know the truth. They prefer to believe what will turn out in the end to be a lie. They prefer to fill their minds and hearts with what comes over the television, or their iPods and iPads, or their cell-phones. They are so much into that stuff that they do not have any time left for getting into what is really the truth, which is the only truth that can save their soul.

The truth is most people think they already know the truth. Whatever they know and whatever they think, they believe is the truth, and so they have zero interest in anything else. In the same way that **Romans 1:28** says, some people “*refuse to have God in their knowledge,*” many people today refuse to have any love of the truth. And that is a very dangerous place to be!

- The truth is, “*we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,*” and “*the wages of sin is death,*” (Romans 3:23 and 6:23).
- The truth is, “*...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6) If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth,*” (1 John 1:5,6)
- The truth is, “*...that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? ... 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,*” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).
- The truth is, “*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He exists and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him,*” (Hebrews 11:6).
- The truth is, “*Unless we repent, we are all going to perish,*” (Luke 13:3).
- The truth is, “*Except you are born again, of the water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God,*” (John 3:5).
- The truth is, “*There is one body (and that one body is the one church) and one Spirit-- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call-- 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all,*” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

This book (the Bible) is a God-given book of truth. Paul said it was given by the inspiration of God, and it was given to us to study and rightly divide, so that we might come to a knowledge of the truth, especially the truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Without a knowledge of what and who this book is about, we are in trouble. We could have a doctor’s degree and have a fluid command of many facts, but if we do not know and discern the truth that is contained in these pages, we are setting ourselves up for the wrath of God. We can be smart, intelligent, education, even successful, well-known and popular, but unless we have a love for the truth, we are in great danger.

So, do you? Do you have a love of the truth? Is knowing and obeying the truth a matter of great priority to you, or do you subscribe to the theory that “ignorance is bliss?”

This morning, if you know that the truth is, your life is not really right with God, what are you going to do about that? Will your love for the truth drive you to humble yourself and do what is right, or will your lack of love for the truth leave you as you are, not saved and not really concerned? Think about that and do what you need or “want” to do, as together we stand and sing.

(Delivered 08/11/13 Hartford Avenue Church of Christ, Ponca City, OK)