

“Love the Truth!”  
2 Thessalonians 2:6-12  
February 27, 2022

As we return to our series *Living According to Hope* in 2 Thessalonians, we are going to discover that *hope belongs to those who love the truth*. Our scripture reading today included verses 1-12, however, we are going to be focusing on vs. 6-12 which is really part 2 of the message from a couple weeks ago on vss. 1-5.

You may recall that Paul was responding to some false teaching that apparently suggested that the Thessalonians had missed the second coming. But Paul reminds them that first the apostasy will come along with the man of lawlessness (otherwise known as the antichrist)—then Christ will come and establish His victory.

The thrust of Paul’s exhortation is stated in vs. 3: “*Let no one in any way deceive you!*” And this exhortation actually gains weight with time, because Paul goes on to warn about coming days of great deception and apostasy. ***What you believe is the most important thing about you and will determine your ultimate destiny.*** This should produce in us an urgency and a passion to search the Scriptures to know what is true and therefore to be particular about what we believe.

As we are going to see our passage today, ***you will either love the truth and be saved or you will love wickedness and perish.*** That may sound extreme to you, as though there should be some middle ground between loving the truth and loving wickedness, yet today’s passage seems to erase the gray.

God is the source of truth and Jesus is the epicenter of truth. Eph 4:21 says that “truth is in Jesus” and Jesus Himself said, “I am the...truth” (Jn 14:6). So today, we are not merely talking about all things that are true in general, like math, science, and facts. Rather we are talking about the epicenter of truth, Jesus, from which all other things are true. For example, to talk about the laws of physics is only a surface-level conversation apart from beholding the God who created all things and Jesus who sustains them by the Word of His power (Heb 1:3). Every fact that can be confirmed is true only by the

providence of God. So to truly love the truth one must love God, the source of all truth. And to truly love the truth, one must love the gospel, whereby Jesus, the epicenter of truth, rescues and redeems us from all falsehood. God is holy and good. He is the very measure by which all things are true or false. Deception enters into our lives when we begin to believe that we can replace a love for God with secondary things. This is idolatry, which by its very nature is wicked. And the worst form of idolatry is loving what is false—loving that which is contrary to what God says is good and true. And so we will either love the truth by embracing Jesus with all the affections of our heart, or we will love wickedness by rejecting Jesus who is ultimately true and good.

So what does all this have to do with 2Thess 2? ***As we anticipate the return of Christ and the events of the last days, we must love the truth and be saved, so as not to be deceived and perish.*** As we have already seen, this will be complicated by the fact that before Christ returns, the antichrist will facilitate a satanic deception that will lead to a great apostasy—a falling away from the truth, a great rebellion against Christ. So Paul calls us to be vigilant in two ways (which I will state both negatively and positively):

1. **Beware of the spirit of lawlessness and hope in the triumph of Christ** (2Thess 2:6-10a).

**[vs. 6-10a]** We already know from vss. 3-4, that before Christ returns, the antichrist will be revealed. He will exalt himself above every so-called god and make himself the central focus of worship on earth. He will be the human epitome of sin, wickedness, and rebellion against God according to vs. 4 by “*proclaiming himself to be God*” (ESV). Remember, back in Genesis 3, the very lure of the original temptation to Eve was that “you will be like God knowing good and evil” (3:5). So the very essence of sin is rebellion against God, seeking to usurp His rightful place. And this is what the antichrist will do on a worldwide scale.

Yet Paul warns us in vs. 7, that long before the antichrist is revealed, the same spirit of lawlessness is already at work in the world. The apostle John confirms this in 1Jn 4:3 where he declared that in his own day, “the spirit of the antichrist...is in the world already.” According to vs. 7, until the

appointed time for antichrist to take his position, something (or someone)<sup>1</sup> restrains him but will be eventually taken out of the way. Apparently, Paul had already told the Thessalonians what or who was restraining the antichrist in [vs. 6], but he doesn't specify it here for *us*. While scholars spend a lot of time trying to figure out specifically what Paul is referring to here, we can be assured that whatever it is, is not outside of God's sovereign hand and plan. Paul's purpose for telling us about the coming man of lawlessness and the apostasy is not to solve our curiosity, but to protect our faith from faltering when we see these things happen, knowing that God is still working out His plan. In Mt 24, Jesus also told us in advance of the coming false prophets who would seek to mislead the elect with great signs and wonders. Why? So that we would not fall prey to their deception and believe them (Mt 24:23-25).

[Vs. 9] tells us that antichrist will be a pawn in the hand of Satan. His deception will be reinforced with supernatural, demonic power and signs and false wonders. The antichrist will seek to impersonate the power of Jesus whose ministry was described by signs and wonders, though it will be contrary to the character of Jesus. The term power in vs. 9 points to the supernatural (demonic) force behind such "miracles." The term "signs" means they are meant to direct people's attention to something beyond themselves, namely to persuade people' allegiance to antichrist, while "wonders" indicate that these demonic power displays are beyond human explanation.<sup>2</sup> They are "false wonders" not because they are fake but because they are meant to persuade people to believe what is false.<sup>3</sup> By the way, this is a great reminder to not make signs and wonders the foundation of your faith.<sup>4</sup> You must rely on truth of the person, work, and teachings of Jesus Christ and his apostles. So you can see how powerful the deception will be that leads many into the great apostasy.

Yet how do we live according to hope in the face of such influential evil? The answer is found in vs 8: "Then that lawless one will be revealed *whom the Lord will slay [or overthrow] with the breath of His mouth and bring to an*

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<sup>1</sup> Paul uses a neuter participle in vs. 6 ("what"), but a masculine participle in vs. 7 ("he").

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New London Commentary), pg. 231.

*end by the appearance of His coming.*" Revelation describes how the antichrist (also referred to as the beast) will be thrown into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone (Rev 19:20; cf. 17:11). We live according to hope knowing that Christ will triumph! We must keep our eyes on the eternal, knowing that even if antichrist and his minions come for us with persecution, torture, and death, Christ will effortlessly triumph and we will be raised to reign with Him!

The second way Paul calls us to be vigilant, is to...

## 2. **Beware of the deception of unbelief and love the truth of the gospel** (2Thess 2:10-12).

[vs. 10-12] Paul turns his attention now to the time of great deception and apostasy that will surround the antichrist. The great danger of deception is that you don't know when you are deceived. The only way to detect deception is to know the truth. Yet at this point we must be very careful. *Knowing the truth does not guarantee that one believes the truth.* One must not only see and acknowledge the truthfulness of the gospel but also truly welcome the truth by loving what he sees.

Notice the key phrase that vs. 10 uses of those who perish: "they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." Or as the ESV puts it, "they refused to love the truth so as to be saved." Those who are saved are those who know the truth of the gospel to be true and *love what see* so that they embrace it with their whole being and own it at all costs. Those who perish are those who although they may have been exposed to or even know the truth, do not welcome it with the love and affections of their heart. They don't cherish it. ***True faith loves the truth of the gospel. True faith embraces the gospel wholeheartedly regardless of the cost.*** The weightiness of this passage is that anything short of true affectionate faith falls under the judgment of God. This is why we evangelicals talk so much about the heart, not just the mind or tradition. Ps 119:165: "Those who love

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "What must happen before the Day of the Lord?" (8-30-87 sermon): [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org).

your law have great peace and nothing causes them to stumble.” We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart...” (Mt 22:37). 1Cor 16:22: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed.” There is no affectionless Christianity.

Perhaps it will be helpful to offer a simple outline of vs. 10-12 (ESV paraphrase):

They perish

**Because** they [refused to love the truth](#) unto salvation

**Therefore** God sends a delusion

**So that** they believe what is false

**In order that** all are judged who

[Did not believe the truth](#), but

[Delighted in unrighteousness](#)

Notice two things in this passage: 1) refusing to love the truth is equivalent to not believing the truth. 2) loving the truth is the opposite of delighting in unrighteousness. Do you see the absence of gray here? We love the truth, or we don't believe the truth. We love the truth, or we love unrighteousness.

Yet the big question that begs to be answered is, why does God send a deluding influence? Is God deceiving them? What God is doing is giving them over to deception in response to their refusal to welcome or love the truth. This is what I referred to last week as *judicial hardening*. It is a means of judgment in the present that seals inevitable final judgment in the future.

This is consistent with how God works. Judgment is not always in the future, but sometimes in the present in the hardening of the heart. For example, Pharaoh hardened his heart but many times God also hardened it as a means of judgment.<sup>5</sup> In Ps 81 God says of the Israelites in the wilderness, “I gave them over to the stubbornness of their hearts to walk in their own devices.” Why? Because they did not listen to the Lord or obey Him. In

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:8; see also Deut 2:30; 1Sam 6:6; 2Ch 36:13

Romans 1, God gave men over to degrading passions and a depraved mind. Why? Because “even though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks” but rather “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom 1:21-28).<sup>6</sup>

Leon Morris captures the essence of this divine judicial hardening in this way: “*God is using the very evil that men and Satan produce for the working out of His purpose. They think they are acting in defiance of Him. But in the end, they find that those very acts in which they expressed their defiance were the vehicle of their punishment.*”<sup>7</sup>

Church, be encouraged that in the last days when persecution rages against God's people, God's just judgment is evident even in the deceit of those who rage against us. Do you see God's mighty hand in 2Thess 2? By some means, God's hand is restraining the spirit of lawlessness in our day. At God's appointed time, antichrist will rise up with all the power of Satan, yet Christ will come and utterly defeat him with eternal judgment. The apostasy will result in a great rebellion, yet none who reject the truth of the gospel will escape God's justice.

Again, Leon Morris captures the sense of God's sovereignty in this passage when he writes:

“God is over all. No wicked person, be he Satan,...the man of lawlessness,... or anyone else, can overstep the bounds which God has appointed him. The Man of Lawlessness will be revealed only as and when God permits....Evil is strong, and will wax stronger in the last times. But God's hand is in the process. Evil will not pass beyond its limits. God's purpose, not that of Satan or his henchmen, will finally be seen to [take effect].”

So how do we live according to hope in the face of such pervasive evil? How do we prepare for the greatest days of testing? *We cling to the sovereign hand of God, and we set our hearts on loving the truth!* Mere knowledge will not hold your anchor in the storm of persecution and satanic testing. But

<sup>6</sup> See also Romans 11:7-8

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *Epistles to the Thessalonians* (New London Commentary), pg. 234.

those who truly love Christ because of the beauty of grace they see in the gospel cannot be torn away from the rock of Christ. Those who love Jesus will say, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

So let me conclude by simply inviting you to see what I see in Jesus and to love what you see in Him.

When I see the holiness of God and the wretchedness of my sin  
My soul despairs, my guilt weighs down, for nothing I can do  
Could ever mend or ill repay the debt I owe to Him.

But when I look to Christ and see His perfect sinless life,  
In love stretched out for me  
Bearing all the weight of all my sin, where Mercy pleads for me

Then I love what I see  
For there the condemnation I deserve,  
He has served for me

And when I see Him buried in the tomb,  
I know sin has lost its power to reign with doom,  
But what of life? Can I be reconciled to God again?

And then I see Him bursting from the grave, with resurrection life  
My soul does sing! My heart, rejoice! For I am raised with Him!  
To my Father's full embrace, reconciled to Him.

Now in His favor I delight, earthly fears can take their flight  
The nations rage, the tempter flares  
But I am safe in my Father's care

Oh, the body they may kill, but my soul is safe in Christ  
For when I die, then I awake,  
For me He has promised to never forsake.

Can you see what I see?  
A Savior crucified, buried, raised, and what He offers me, and you?

Lay down your sin, your stubborn will, and let Him make you new.

For when you love Him,  
You will find,  
His mercy fully satisfies.