

The Second Coming ■ Not Before the ‘Man of Lawlessness’

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of focusing on the unseen eternal truths rather than the visible, temporary circumstances. It addresses the urgency of understanding the second coming of Christ in the context of persecution, deception, and the need for steadfastness in good works. The root issue highlighted is the human tendency to find pleasure in unrighteousness rather than in truth, emphasizing the critical role of Christian hedonism in protecting against end-time deception.

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Matthew 24:24, Deuteronomy 13:1, 1 John 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, Psalm 16:11, Mark 12:30

Topics: "Eternal Perspective", "Steadfastness in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. This outer nature is wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed day by day because we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. And so I pray, Lord, that you would grant us the kind of eyes, Paul called them the eyes of the heart, that can look, look at the unseen.

I ask this in Jesus' name, amen. So when Paul introduced the teaching on the second coming in chapter 1 of 2 Thessalonians, and I encourage you to open your Bibles right now, we'll be looking in significant detail at chapters 2 and 3. But when he introduced the teaching on the second coming in chapter 1 of 2 Thessalonians, like we saw Monday night, he did so precisely to help the church understand how it was a righteous judgment of God that he would appoint for them to walk through persecutions and afflictions. So his first treatment of the theme of eschatology is not in a chapter in a systematic theology book as precious as those are, but as an urgent message right here to people who are being slandered, being fired from their jobs, being beaten, being jailed, being killed.

In other words, he's writing about the second coming for the sake of Pastor Wang Yi in China, who just got sentenced to nine years in jail a few weeks ago. He's writing for the family of Pastor Lawan Andimi in Nigeria, who was just beheaded two weeks ago. He's writing for Fatima Mohammadi in Iran because she's disappeared and we don't know where she is.

That's the context of Thessalonica and us. However, persecution and suffering are not the only issue at Thessalonica, and Paul has another problem to deal with, and he deals with it again with the second coming, and the question is, how? So what's the second issue? The second issue is that some people have quit their jobs, they're not working anymore, and they're becoming a nuisance to the others who have jobs, and they're mooching off of them and not earning any money. That's the situation.

Where did it come from? That's what the second coming is introduced for at the beginning of chapter two. So chapter one, you could say, he introduces the teaching on the second coming designed to help Christians believe and love each other through suffering, and now in chapter two he goes into even more detail about the second coming designed to counteract the hysteria in the community and get people back to work. So we could say the aim of eschatology in chapter one is steadfastness in suffering, and the aim of eschatology in chapter two and three is steadfastness in doing good work and earning a living.

So let's read chapter three, verses one to fifteen, and I don't want you to take my word for it that this is the situation, I want you to see it and then make the connection with chapter two on the second coming. Finally, brothers, this is chapter three, 2 Thessalonians, verse one. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored or be glorified as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men for not all have faith, but the Lord is faithful.

He will establish you and guard you against the evil one, and we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things that we commanded. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ. Now, we command you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus, that you keep away from any brother who's walking in idleness.

That's the number one problem in chapter three. Brothers who are walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you receive from us. He already taught them about this when he was there.

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we weren't idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it. But with toil and labor, we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you. It wasn't because we didn't have a right.

But to give you ourselves as an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command, if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at any work, but busy bodies.

Now, such persons we command and encourage in the Lord, in the Lord Jesus Christ, to do their work. Get back to work. Do your work quietly and earn your own living.

As for you brothers, don't grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him that he may be ashamed. Don't regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

That's pretty clear, I think. The situation is negatively, I'm going to condemn your idleness. You shouldn't be idle.

And don't be so nosy, going and poking in other people's business and mooching off of the people who are earning a living. That's negative. Positively, he says, be steadfast, toil, labor, non-dependent on others, earning your own living, not growing weary in doing good.

And it's all rooted in verse 3, the Lord is faithful. He will establish you. He will do this.

He will direct your hearts to the steadfastness of Christ. And because of verses 3 and verse 5, verse 3, God is faithful. Verse 5, he'll establish your hearts in the steadfastness of Christ.

Because of this work of Christ in you now, I'm telling you to do some things and not to do some things. Verse 6, avoid people who are walking in idleness. Instead, verse 7, imitate us.

We weren't idle. Verse 8, we didn't eat anybody's bread without paying for it. We worked night and day not to burden any of you.

Verse 9, we could have demanded that you take care of us, we're apostles for goodness sakes. But instead, we worked and chose to lead by example rather than demand. So, in verses 10 and 11, Paul tells the brothers who have stopped working, we're not going to take care of you anymore.

It comes an end to this because you've chosen idleness and you need to get back to work. So stop meddling in other people's affairs and mooching off of others. Do your work quietly.

Verse 12, do your work quietly and earn your living. And then verse 13, no matter how long this affliction lasts until the Lord comes, don't grow weary in well-doing. Fill your lives up with gainful employment, doing good work, and volunteer employment, doing good works.

That's the situation. Now, how did he deal with it? People are quitting their jobs, living in idleness, mooching off of others. How would you deal with that? And the answer is chapter 2, it appears that there's a kind of hysteria that has taken over the community, gripped some in the church.

They're being shaken out of their senses. And they're in the sway of an irrational excitement. So let's read about it.

Verse 1, chapter 2, now, concerning the coming of our Lord Christ. Now, pause there, coming. Parousias, genitive, is the ordinary word that Paul uses five times in the Thessalonian letters to refer to the second coming.

And now, concerning the coming of our Lord Christ, and our being gathered together, episynagoges, significant because it's the word Jesus used in Matthew 24, 31, the Son of Man will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and He will gather, episynaksun, He will gather His elect from the four winds. Right. So we've got two parallels with Jesus, parousias and episynagoge, and its verb form in Jesus.

He's talking about the second coming, the angels sent out, the in-gathering of the elect to welcome the Lord home. That's the situation he's describing here. We ask you, brothers, verse 2 now, not to be quickly, so evidently it's happened already, it's in process, they're quitting their jobs, not to be quickly shaken in mind, literally shaken from your mind, shaken from your understanding.

You've lost your senses. You're out of touch with reason. Or, here comes a third parallel with Jesus, this is really important to get your bearings on what Paul's talking about here, or alarmed.

Don't be shaken out of your brain, and don't be alarmed, thraisthai. That word is used one other place, in the mouth of Jesus, namely, in two texts, Matthew 24, 6, Mark 13, 7, here's what he says, you will hear wars, and rumors of wars, see that you are not alarmed, thraisthai, only 2 Thessalonians 2, 1, only in the mouth of Jesus, both serving the same function, don't be alarmed, he's not here yet. That's significant.

You want to get your bearings on what Paul is talking about, and how Matthew 24 works in the mind of Paul, that's the thing you attend to. Three words, parallel, and there are more. Do this study, this is important.

Just another parenthesis, so when Joe Rigney up here said that clearly, in Matthew 24, there's a telescoping of the ages, so that some things happen all through history, some happen within a generation, some happen at the end, and he said, big challenge, which is which? This is how you find out. This is how you find out how the apostles thought about what Jesus meant in Matthew 24. Very significant.

Let's keep reading, I stopped with alarmed. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. That's Jesus talking.

Now back to Paul, don't be alarmed either by a spirit, so that's some word of prophecy probably because that's the way John talks about it in 1 John 4, lots of prophets test every spirit, so a spirit, somebody said, oh, I had a dream last night, he's here. Or, spoken word, like some oral report, or a letter, and any part of it, the spirit, the report, the letter, seeming to be from us, like it has apostolic authority. It doesn't, Paul is saying, seeming to be from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

The word there is not the usual New Testament words for nearness, like he has come near, this is anistemi, he's here, it's here now. That's the mistake, and Paul says, verse 3, let no one deceive you. So my interpretation of how chapter 2 and 3 relate is that this idleness and meddling of chapter 3 is owing to this hysteria in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2. They're being shaken out of their proper use of their reason, and they're in the grip of an alarmist emotional mindset.

The day of the Lord, that is, the coming of Christ, Parousias, that is the gathering by the angels to meet the Lord in the air, is here. And if you say, that makes no sense, Paul would say, that's my point. They're out of their minds, shaken out of their mind.

That's what hysteria is, it's irrational. It's come, perhaps, from a prophecy, a vision. This is how lots of heresies get started, right? Somebody has a vision, Joseph Smith type vision, or whatever, and you add to apostolic teaching this vision.

And Paul says, no, no, this does not have my imprimatur on it. So now, you can see a double-pronged challenge in Thessalonica for the sober-minded believers who haven't lost their senses. One challenge, we've got persecution to deal with, and we don't understand what's going on here, and how to fit this in, and Paul deals with that in chapter 1. I'll tell you exactly how it's a right judgment of God, and that was Monday night.

And the second issue is, I don't know how many, but a lot of you are out of your minds, and you're quitting your jobs. And that has to be dealt with, and that's today's message. So how does the Lord's coming, this is so amazing, that he would go into the kind of detail he goes into on the second coming, and the days leading up to it, to handle this issue of, get back to work.

I love Paul, don't you love Paul? So let's read chapter 2, verses 3 to 12, let no one deceive you in any way, because for that day, say it again, day of the Lord, parousia, gathering to meet him in the air with the angels, that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And you know, because I told you, we don't, and he hasn't told us. You know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time, his time.

God has a time for the man of lawlessness, it's not here yet, it'll come, when whatever the restrainer is, is taken away, God's in charge of that. And you know what is restraining him now, so that when, I'm still in verse 6, so that when he may be revealed, so that he may be revealed in his time, verse 7, for the mystery of lawlessness, so you've got a man of lawlessness, and now you've got a mystery of lawlessness, is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he's out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed, comma, relative clause, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nothing by the appearance of his parousia.

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan. With all power, that's a remarkable phrase for a man, empowered by Satan, that should be a God phrase, right? With all power, and it's the false signs and wonders, we'll come back to that, and with all wicked deception, come back to that, for those who are perishing because they refuse to love the truth, they didn't love it, they didn't want to love it, that's where we'll end, therefore, God sends them a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false, and may be condemned with all who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Now two things strike me immediately about Paul's response to the situation of the alarmist irrational disorientation concerning the second coming in Thessalonica.

One of these two things that strike me is how amazingly detailed and long and full it is. He goes on and on, right, about the rebellion, and a man of lawlessness, and sitting in the temple of God, and something restraining him, and a mystery of lawlessness, and satanic power, and signs and wonders, and a great delusion, and the appearing of Jesus, and the slaying, that's a lot to get people back to work. And then to say, it's not here yet, folks.

The other thing that strikes me is that in spite of all this detail, he has left us with unanswered questions, like, what rebellion? What man of lawlessness, who's that? What temple seated in? What restrainer, person or thing, masculine and neuter in the text? What's the mystery of lawlessness? So, on the one hand, he says more than I expected, and on the other hand, the more that he says leaves me with a lot of unanswered questions. Now, I think verse 5 explains those two impressions that I get reading this text. Look at verse 5, don't you remember, and evidently they didn't very well anyway, don't you remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? That's amazing, like how long was he in Thessalonica, chapter 17 of Acts, verses 1 to 9, a few weeks? And he told them about the man of lawlessness, baby Christians, not insignificant, perhaps in your discipleship, so he had told them these things, and in remarkable detail had he told them these things, and it looks like they've forgotten, so it seems like because of their failure to remember, he's rehearsing so much, but since they had already heard this, he doesn't answer every question.

I mean, I'm sure, I mean, I probably wouldn't stake my life on it, that when he taught this in those three weeks, somebody raised their hand and said, who's the man of lawlessness? I mean, so, and I'm sure he didn't say, none of your business, he probably would have helped them. Now, here's a lesson, we'll

parenthesis on the nature of Scripture. In God's providence, in creating and preserving this book, like the epistles, for his church in all ages, God does not see to it that everything the early church talked about with the apostles we get to know.

We don't. And I think that is a work of God's wisdom and goodness. He knows what he's doing.

It's better for us to know what is preserved in this book of apostolic and prophetic writings than that we know all the detailed conversations Paul had at Thessalonica. It's better. Or God is unwise in inspiration.

We have what we need for salvation and God-pleasing obedience. We don't have enough, as the panel made plain yesterday, to answer all our questions. And we're not meant to.

So, what can we know from this chapter? What can we know from 2 Thessalonians 2 that will help us not be shaken loose from our senses, or fall into the alarmist hysteria of any eschatological mistake, but rather remain steadfast in good works and gainful employment? That's my question. Let's see what we can learn. Seems to me, and this will be my outline for the rest of this message, that Paul says there are two things that has to happen before the parousia, and he explains why he mentions those two things out of all the things he could mention, and he takes us to the very practical root of the matter that explains how you can be protected from the hysteria and deceit of the last day, which has, of course, begun, but will come to a climax when? Verse 3, let's talk about the first thing that has to happen.

Let no one deceive you in any way, for that day will not come unless the rebellion, or the apostasy, the falling away, comes first. Now, that word, rebellion or apostasy, has to refer to more than the process of ups and downs in biblical faithfulness of God's people over the centuries. Has to refer to more than that, because that observation won't work in Paul's argument.

It's of no help in settling the hysteria that has taken over in some of the people of Thessalonica. If it's plausible that they could say to Paul, well, of course, the rebellion has already happened. There's lots of people falling away because of this persecution.

If they could plausibly say that, Paul's argument is useless here. It's of no help in answering his issue. So, Paul, when he says, the rebellion hasn't happened, the apostasy hasn't happened, he's thinking of something decisive, epic-making, climaxing, recognizable, catastrophic, sweeping, just before the man of lawlessness is revealed and Jesus kills him.

And since we have seen numerous parallels, like three so far, we'll see others. Since we've seen three parallels between the Thessalonian language about the second coming and Jesus' language about the second coming, it's fitting, therefore, that we take our cue and go to Jesus and say, do you have anything to say about the apostasy? Is he getting this from you, like he got so much from you, it seems? And I think the answer is yes. Go to Matthew 24, verses 9 to 13, I'll read it to you.

Matthew 24, 9 to 13. Then, these words, then, are significant running through this. Then, after the beginning of the global birth pangs, then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations by my name's sake.

That's provocative. Because *panta ta esne*, all nations here, evidently world evangelization is virtually over, because all the nations know enough about Jesus to hate his people. They'll deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

And then, well along in church history, therefore, many will fall away. Apostasy rebellion. Many.

Gone. Many will fall away and betray one another, hate one another. Now, of course that happens all through history.

Nobody's denying that. That's why you've got this telescoping ambiguity in the Bible, Old and New Testament. Many will fall away, but remember John said, many antichrists have come, that's how we know the end is here, but the antichrist is coming.

They thought this way. Of course that happens all through history. But the word then, verse 10, seems to show that Jesus is thinking a climactic gathering storm.

Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray, because lawlessness is increased. Ring any bells? We're talking man of lawlessness. We're talking mystery of lawlessness.

Where'd Paul get that? Why go anywhere else? He's getting everything else here. Lawlessness will be increased. We're at Matthew 24, 12 for that.

Lawlessness will be increased, and the love of many will grow cold. Great rebellion and apostasy. But the one who endures to the end, which sounds like final decisive generation language, will be saved.

So that's the kind of thing Paul, I think, is reading in the tradition that he handed on, is I gave you these traditions, and that's the way he's thinking about the climactic rebellion or apostasy at the end. It's decisive. It's epic making.

It's catastrophic. It's coming from inside and outside the church. All nations hating you from outside, great growing cold on the inside.

That's coming, Paul says. It's not limited to a period of time. It's not limited to history as a process.

It's identifiable. That's why he can argue the way he's arguing. It's not here yet.

Go back to work. Second thing, second event, so first rebellion apostasy has to come. Here's the second thing that has to happen.

Mainly the man of lawlessness, and he's trying to say the coming, the parousia, the gathering to meet the Lord in the air. The day of the Lord isn't here, because before that, this has to happen. Verse three again, let no one deceive you in any way, for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first, and number two, the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.

So let's do Puritan here. Jason said eighthly, ninthly, tenthly. I'm going to do seventhly.

Seven things clearly are said here about the man of lawlessness. Number one, he's a man. He's not an angel, not a demon, just human.

Could be you. Two, he is quintessentially lawless. That is, considered himself above law.

He's lawless. Number three, since there is only one above law, God, who renders all law, that's what he claims to be. Verse four, 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.

That's a final climactic anti-Christ. Paul doesn't use that word here, just manifest. I am Christ, your God.

Number four, he is born for destruction. Verse three, middle of the verse, the son of destruction, that is, his DNA if Paul were to use DNA, his seed from his father is destruction. Son of a gun, no, son of destruction, born for it, has no future.

Quintessentially lawless and doomed by the nature of lawlessness. Number five, as a man, he's coming nevertheless by the power of Satan. Verse nine, the coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan.

Therefore, number six, as a man, he will have supernatural power. Satan is supernatural. Paul calls it all power, and he will work signs and wonders.

Now, when the ESV says in verse nine, false signs and wonders, that's a confusing translation because I think almost everybody would read that to mean they're not real signs and wonders, they're tricks. They're rabbits out of a hat. They're using mirrors.

They're not. Satan works signs and wonders. Many will say to me on that day, did we not do many mighty works? And Jesus won't say, no, you didn't.

They did. Go to Deuteronomy 13, right, verses one to three. When a false prophet comes and tells you to depart from Yahweh and prophesize, if that prophecy comes true, don't follow him.

It comes true. It happens here as well. He's testing your love, love for the truth.

So, let's translate it, signs and wonders of the lie. Literal translation, signs and wonders of the lie. They serve the lie.

That's what they do. Satan empowers the man of lawlessness to do signs and wonders. Millions of Christians think, cool, that's my God, and go after him and are deceived.

They serve the lie. Number seven, therefore the man of lawlessness will be unparalleled in his ability to deceive. Verse 10, with all wicked deception for those who are perishing.

Now, again, the translation wicked deception obscures something we've got to see. It's deception of unrighteousness. Deception of unrighteousness.

Adikia. And the reason I've got to see it is because it's repeated at the end of verse 12, and the parallel is crucial. Oh, yes.

So, the deception is going to be by means of making unrighteousness look really juicy. It's going to be so juicy you can't resist it, unless you love and take superior pleasure in the truth. So, again, I would argue Paul here is unpacking the prophecies of Jesus in Matthew 24.

Let's read Matthew 24, 21 to 27. Then there will be great tribulation, Jesus says, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now. No, and never will be.

This is climactic. Verse 24 of Matthew 24, false Christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders. Signs and wonders, where did Paul get that notion that that would be done in a great tribulation? Signs and wonders will be performed to lead astray.

There's the apostasy, the deception. If possible, even the elect. Now, watch verse 26.

So, if they say to you, look, he's in the wilderness. Did you notice? He, not they, not these false prophets. He just said there's going to be a lot of false prophets, and now he's got to get down on one end.

Paul reads this in the tradition. So, if they say, look, he's in the wilderness, don't go out. If they say, look, he's in the inner rooms, don't you believe it? Tell you why.

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. I remember sitting with Moonies in my office after a sermon. They were just making wolf-like approaches to my people, and I grabbed them after a sermon and said, come back here.

This is 1983 or so. Sat them down in my office, three of them, and I said, look, you believe Son Moon is Christ. Yep.

Can I read you a verse? I read them this verse. As the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. I haven't seen it.

And they said, we'll bring our prophet in and he'll explain it. No, no. This is clear enough for me.

A hysteria produces Moonies. At the close of this climactic period of lawlessness and a great deception led by a person, Paul is saying the Son of Man will come unmistakably. And Jesus is saying unmistakably, like light flashing from horizon to horizon.

Now, I don't think we need to know what temple he's talking about in verse 4. Can it sit in the temple of God? I don't know what that is. I think we can be sure it's not a reference to 70 A.D. and the desecration of the temple there. I think we can be sure of that because Paul steps back in verse 8 and describes his coming, the man of lawlessness.

He steps back in verse 8 and he says, and then when he's no longer restrained, the lawless one is revealed, comma, whom Jesus will kill. With the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of the parousia of verse 1. Not some other parousia type. That don't work in this text.

And I'm sure 70 A.D. was a foretaste of that. Absolutely. The telescoping concept of prophecy is not like an either or.

You can only have stuff at the end or you can only have stuff in 70 A.D. I just don't think that's the way the apostles thought. It's not the way Paul thought about the way Jesus' language, often used to apply to 70 A.D., applies to the end in the mind of Paul. Whatever its precursor fulfillments were in 70 A.D. So this coming, parousias, is the coming when the angels gather the elect, Matthew 24, 31, and verse 1 here in chapter 2. It's the coming of 2 Thessalonians 1, 7, with mighty angels inflaming fire, wreaking vengeance on all unbelievers.

It's the second coming or the coming, the parousia of 1 Thessalonians 2, 19, 3, 13, 4, 15, where we're all raised from the dead and welcome Jesus back. So this rebellion and this man of lawlessness, those two things, this rebellion and this man of lawlessness are at the climactic end of the age and they are ended, they are undone, they are abolished by the glorious appearing of the coming of the Lord as he gathers his elect and establishes his final kingdom. So, where he sits in his period of time between his coming and his slaying, Paul's not talking time there, but where that guy sits down could be the Vatican, could be Geneva, could be Salt Lake City, could be Colorado Springs, could be Jerusalem.

I don't think it's of the essence. It will be in the place of global, focused, Christian worship, which has become anti-Christian. That's where it'll be, wherever.

You know the temple of God has more than one meaning in the apostle Paul. There's one last thing I want you to see as we move towards the close. Why did Paul choose these two events? Strange, isn't it? You want to get people back to work, and you want to establish them in good deeds, and you choose these bizarre, from our perspective, and yet absolutely important things that Paul taught baby believers in the first three weeks of discipleship.

Why did he choose them? Why is he talking about this? It's because, in my judgment, it enables him to get at the root of the matter as to why the Thessalonians, why countless numbers of professing believers, and why we could be sucked into a deception. Why? It enables him to get at the root issue, and the root issue is not a mental misplacement of the second coming. Like, I've mentally got the wrong chart, or I've mentally got the wrong ordering.

That's not the root problem. It's a problem, he's sitting straight, but that's not the root problem. The root problem is the tendency of the human heart not to love.

But to find pleasure in unrighteousness. That's the root problem. So, Paul chooses to highlight rebellion, apostasy.

Why? It's a reference to what happens in here. I was going to church, and now I'm going to love unrighteousness and believe a lie. And Paul's watching this happen.

This is what happens right here. He's watching this rebellion, and he says, I've got to address that. That's the problem in every age, and it will be at the end.

And secondly, he's going to talk about the power of a man of lawlessness to deceive with unrighteousness. Deception of unrighteousness. Because the rebellious heart doesn't love the truth, does find pleasure in unrighteousness, and that's the root problem.

Look how he ends the paragraph in verses 10 to 12. Why will they be deceived? Why will they perish? Verse 10, because they refuse to love the truth. Don't miss that word love.

It does not say believe. It does not say be convinced of. It does not say stand for.

It's not a mental word. It's a heart word. With all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, do this, or you will be deceived.

They refused it. Don't want the love of truth. Not just I don't want truth.

I don't want love of truth. The very thought of loving truth is so foreign to me. That's what deceived people feel, literally because they did not welcome a love for the truth.

They didn't want the love of the truth in their hearts, and that's why they are deceived, and that's why they are perishing. And it gets clearer. It gets clearer in verse 11 and 12.

What's the love of the truth that they don't have? What is that? You're using the word love. What do you mean, Paul? Well, they don't welcome a love for the truth. Therefore, God sends them.

Are you with me? Verse 11, God sends them a strong delusion. So you don't want to love the truth? All right. Delusion is my appointment for millions of Christians.

God sends a strong delusion so that they may believe what is false. Now, is that believing, believing, there's the word. Yes, it does say believing.

Does that believing what is false and falling in line with the man of lawlessness, is that at root an intellectual mistake? No. Verse 12b, 12 at the end. It may be for pastors the most important sentence in the whole paragraph, the whole chapter.

They did not believe the truth, but here's the alternative to what I mean by believing in the truth. They had pleasure. Eudoxias, same word used for this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

They had pleasure in unrighteousness. So the opposite of believing the truth is to find pleasure in unrighteousness. Or believing the truth includes finding pleasure in truth.

Love for truth, as verse 10 says. You see how verse 10 and 12 are saying the same thing? They don't want to love the truth. They want to love their sin.

They want to love lawlessness. They're going after this. Big time, it feels better.

Feels better. Not an intellectual problem at root. So the battle to protect yourself, pastor, and your church, the battle to protect them from the coming apostasy, which of course always is here in measure, the coming apostasy is to pray and preach and live in such a way that you and your people are able to lay down your lives for the superior pleasure you have in righteousness and truth and Christ.

So I summarize and close. The way Paul got people back to work, it's just wonderful. I hope your people are working.

Help them work. Help them work. The way Paul got people back to work was to argue that the second coming hadn't happened yet.

So be done with the hysteria and get back to work. And he supported the claim it hasn't happened yet by saying, showing that there's an end-time apostasy that hasn't happened and must happen, and there's a man of lawlessness who's going to show up like that, and it hasn't happened. He hasn't come yet either.

And in choosing these two events to highlight a massive turning away of the human heart from God to unrighteousness and the appearing of a man with supernatural power to deceive with unrighteousness, in choosing those two, Paul was able to get at the root issue of why the rebellion is going to happen, why the Thessalonians are already being shaken out of their brains into deception, and how you can help your people not be deceived. And in showing the root of how this happens, Paul shows pastors how to prepare, how to protect their people. The great apostasy, the great deception happened, he says, not because people don't have a clear mental picture of the timing of the second coming.

That's not the root problem. If you major on that, you'll miss the root. Say it.

Preach it. It's here. But notice how he ends.

That's not the root issue. The apostasy and deception will happen because people will feel. That's what you do with pleasure.

You don't think pleasure. You feel pleasure. People will feel pleasure in unrighteousness more than in truth.

It all comes down to verses 10 and 12. It really does. It all comes down to verses 10 and 12, which get at the same thing in different ways.

Here's verse 10 again, because it's the root. Because they're going to perish. They're going to be deceived.

Your people are going to be swept away in the apostasy. Your people will be swept away in the precursors of the apostasy or the final apostasy. Whenever it comes, they're going to be swept away because they don't want to love doctrine, truth.

It's a love issue. It's a love issue. Not mainly an intellectual issue.

Some of the simplest people in your church are so far ahead of the educated. Verse 12, to wrap it up. They're going to be condemned.

Who? Who did not believe the truth. Yes, you should use the word believe, but you shouldn't leave it there as though they know what you're talking about, because they don't. Who do not believe the truth, but alternative to believing the truth, had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So believing involves having more pleasure in truth than in unrighteousness. So I'm going to close like this. And I mean this as seriously as I can muster.

Christian hedonism. Christian hedonism. If you don't know the phrase, I'll give it to you in two sentences in a minute.

Lots of you know the phrase. I coined it. Not really.

C.S. Lewis used it. Bernard Eller used it. A bunch of people have used it, but I make a big deal out of it.

Because it's a big deal. It's not marginal. It's central.

It's everywhere. Christian hedonism is the antidote to end-time deception. If you want to take away a sentence from this message, Christian hedonism is the antidote for your people to protect them against end-time deception.

Here's the doctrine. God is most glorified in you when you are most pleased, satisfied, happy, content, delighting in, treasuring God. God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him.

And therefore, you and your people, you teaching them, devote all, taking all from mind, heart, strength, all their energies to maximize the pleasure that they and others have in God. That's their calling, and that's their protection. So that doctrine, Christian hedonism, God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him, and therefore you should devote all your energies to maximizing the pleasure that we and others have in God.

That doctrine, pastors, is how you help your people go back to work, two, how you multiply their good deeds, and three, how you prepare them to meet the man of lawlessness undeceived. God, it really does. You have made it so plain.

For these pastors, this is not complex. Details about eschatology are complex. What to do for your people is not complex.

Helping them by preaching and praying and modeling to find more pleasure in God than in unrighteousness is not ambiguous. It's massive. So protect these pastors, their wives, the other ministers here of the gospel, men and women.

Protect them from the man of lawlessness and every precursor that crops out in these days through satisfying their souls in Christ. I ask in His name. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/y1wvKV6y5dU.mp4>

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