

The Coming Great Deception

by Steve Gallagher

The great deception will come from within the Christian religion, and it's essential to be vigilant and on guard against deception to avoid being led astray.

Duration: 44:03

Scripture: Psalm 15:2, Psalm 51:6, Psalm 145:18, Matthew 24:3, Romans 1:18, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 4:4

Topics: "Great Deception"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the consequences of rejecting the truth of God's word. He emphasizes the importance of understanding right from wrong and warns against accepting falsehoods as truth. The preacher also highlights the judgment that awaits those who do not believe in God. He concludes by mentioning the final giving over to one's desires and the need for continuous warning messages to ensure understanding and obedience. The sermon references verses from the Bible, including Matthew 24 and the concept of God's holiness being vindicated.

Transcript

Most preachers, I guess I could say, tend to bring a positive word to their congregations. And, you know, that could range all the way from flattering false teachers all the way to pastors who really love God and are trying to attract people into what they enjoy in God. You understand? So there's a wide range and most are in there in between somewhere.

But my job in life, my calling, my burden, what God has put on my heart is to be someone who brings a word of warning. And I have to fulfill my call, you understand, because there's a need in this day and age for that kind of a voice in the church. And I may not have a loud voice, but I will tell you this, that by God's grace, I will spend the rest of my life calling people into repentance and asking people to search their hearts and to make sure that they really are in the faith, that they have a relationship with God that is viable and real and will last whatever may come.

Well, Pastor Steve, you know, it just seems like every time you preach, it's these negative warning messages. That's right, and I'm going to keep doing it until you get it right. And since there's always new guys coming in, I guess I'll just keep doing it right.

My congregation is forever in fluctuation here. Praise the Lord. I'm going to be getting to 2 Thessalonians 2 as our text this morning, but I want to just touch on a couple of verses out of Matthew 24 first.

Matthew 24 is the first half of the Olivet Discourse, and it all begins because the disciples have been so impacted by Jesus's scathing rebuke of the Pharisees that they say to him, Lord, what is the sign of your coming and the sign of the end of the age? So the entire Olivet Discourse is in answer to that question. 97 verses. But the very first thing that Jesus says in that discourse of 97 verses is this.

It's found in verses 4 and 5. Take care. Now, different translations say that differently, but it is a word of warning. And can I tell you that this was not a word of warning to the disciples.

This was a word of warning to those who would be alive in the end times when these things would come upon the earth. Take care. Beware.

Be on guard. Be watchful spiritually that you do not allow anyone to deceive you. Many will come making use of my name.

They will say I am Christ and many, many, many will be deceived by it. We are entering a time in world history right now where a massive and pervasive deception is coming upon this earth. And do you know where it's coming from? Through the Christian religion.

It's not coming from the New Age teachings. It's not coming from Islam. As much as many Christian preachers and teachers want to say it is, I'm telling you it's not coming from those quarters.

Jesus said it's coming from those who will make use of his name. That whole thinking of wanting to get it out there somewhere. Oh, it's the Muslims.

That's the big thing in the last 10 years, 20 years. It's the New Age movement. That's what the great deception is.

Well, they are deceiving and they are false, of course, but that's not the deception Jesus Christ is talking about. And people who are in the church who are constantly trying to throw it out there, it's because they don't want to deal with their own hearts. I worry about many of the Christian activists.

Mike and I have had long discussions about this. And he's more vigilant about this than I am probably, but you know, because he comes out of that background and he saw so many people who were willing to fight, fight, fight for the morality of our nation, which is good. It's a good thing, but never willing to take a look at their own hearts.

It's always out there somewhere. We're entering a time of a pervasive deception. And I want to tell you something that's going to be extremely persuasive and convincing.

It revolves around the name of Christ. I want to just mention here, Dave Ravenhill wrote an article recently for Charisma magazine on this, basically this phrase here, you know, many will come saying, I am Christ. And he made the point that that term literally means I am the anointed one.

Now, let me just ask you, and it's a very good point. I had never thought about it. As soon as I read that, I knew he hit it.

That was it. I never, it never made sense to me. Which one of you would believe if some guy walked up to you and said, I'm Jesus Christ.

Who's going to believe that? Nobody's going to buy that, right? No, you're going to be calling the cops and saying, Hey, there's this weird guy over here. No, but when someone comes claiming to have an anointing from God, preaching things that your flesh wants to hear, that's different. Many are going to come like that.

Dear ones, many are in the body of Christ right now in that spirit. All right, now let's turn to our text in second Thessalonians two verses nine through 12, which are a commentary on what Jesus said here. You know, Jesus said this about 30 AD, 33 AD, right around there.

Paul comes in later, 15 years later or whatever, and writes this letter to the Thessalonian church because there was some confusion about the coming of the Lord and so on. And so he writes this letter to explain things better. And this right here is kind of a commentary on something that, on what we had just read that Jesus had said.

And also as to clear the air on some things. He's talking about the day of the Lord. He's saying, listen, same words.

Don't let anyone deceive you about this. The day of the Lord is not going to come until two things happen. The antichrist, this man of sin is revealed and the great falling away, the apostasy.

Those two things have to occur before the day of the Lord. All right, that's what the whole context here of what Paul is describing. And then he goes on to talk about this man and some things about him.

And then in verse nine, he starts to transition into talking about the people of the apostasy. Let's read it here. That is the one who's coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

For this reason, God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. Can I just tell you that the reason we sin is because we enjoy sinning? Whatever the sin is, I don't care what it is. You do it because you enjoy it.

Your flesh likes it. Now, I want to point out that, you know, kind of what I just said that the subject has changed now. It's kind of slid from, you know, the biblical style.

It'll transition from one subject to another. The Antichrist was the primary subject of these preceding verses. Now the primary subject is found in this little phrase here, for those who are perishing.

For those who are perishing. And by coincidence, that is the very same phrase that we find in another passage. Something else Paul wrote, 1 Corinthians 118, for the word of the cross is foolishness.

To who? To those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And there it is, the dividing line between all humanity.

Now, I want to just briefly blow through this passage and point out some characteristics of these people that are being described here, those who are perishing. Okay. I just want to point these out.

This isn't, these aren't six points in my message. That's coming up here in a minute. We're still in the introduction.

But let me just blow through this, just to kind of give a fuller sense about the context of what's being expressed here. So these six characteristics of these people, all the deception of wickedness is for them. Wow.

All the deception of wickedness is for them. They are the targets of this massive campaign of falsehood. They're the targets.

Can I just tell you that the enemy doesn't need to deceive the unsaved. They're his. He owns them.

They are blind to the gospel, as we heard earlier. They're not interested. Some of them will be saved, of course, you know, praise the Lord.

God will break through to them. But this is not describing the unbelieving multitudes. This is describing the target of this massive campaign of deception of the end times.

It's referred to also in the first seal that is broken. It is a conquering spirit that is going to bring in deception in a global way. Number two, they did not receive the love of the truth.

Now here's the deal. God is not offering you the truth only. He's offering you something else.

The love of truth. The love of truth. He's offering you a disposition to recognize and to be able to discern truth from falsehood.

Do you want that disposition? He's offering it to you. He's offering it to every professing believer. I need to say that, you know, these people, of course, are not receiving it, right? So that brings us to the next point.

There's a reason God does this next thing. It's because they have shut it out. They do not want to hear the truth.

God will send a deluding influence upon them. You know, the Lord will continue to reach out to people, continue to introduce and to communicate and to present truth to them. But if they keep shutting him out, the time comes that God's not going to strive with the man forever.

The time comes when God will withdraw his grace from that person and turn him over to a lying spirit. And if you want to see what that is like, spend the afternoon today and go and read the story of King Saul, who when he first began, you know, he was a humble man, but by the end of his life, he's tormented by false impressions, tormented by false impressions, driving him mad. Why? Because the offer had been made and rejected.

And when that comes upon a person, well, that brings us to number four. They will believe what is false. Everything is turned around by now.

They accept a lie, a fraud as truth, as their truth. Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness. And you know, I would say in the church, that isn't the case, but I would say there's a lot of fuzziness about right and wrong.

Here is kind of the bottom line for it all. They will be judged for their unbelief. I want to just tell you that when it's all said and done, God's holiness will be vindicated.

God's holiness will be vindicated, regardless of how man responds to the offers of his grace. God's holiness will be vindicated. And number six, now I don't know if this is like in this flow that is going on, this is the final giving over, you know, to just give them over to what their hearts have desired, or is this just a reason for the whole rejection of the truth? I don't know which it is, one way or the other.

Now, you all know that I like to read verses when I'm studying the Bible. I like to read it in different translations because it brings out a fuller picture of what was being expressed. And so what I did is I took these four verses and I created a composite from various translations, you know, the Amplified and some others.

And I want to just read this. Just listen. I'm hoping that maybe hearing it from a different slant will make it a little more real to all of us.

For at the coming of the Lord there will be great activity on the part of Satan. The coming of the lawless one, the Antichrist, will have all Satan's influence to aid him. There will be no lack of power of counterfeit signs and wonders.

And by unlimited seduction to evil and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, going to perdition, because they did not welcome into their hearts the love of the truth so that they might be saved. And for this cause God will give them up to the power of deceit and they will put their faith in what is false and meet the inevitable judgment of all who have refused to believe the truth and who have made evil their playfellow. Wow.

That's powerful. It is a powerful reality of what is going on now, what we are heading into now. There is a spiritual atmosphere growing in the Western world.

Now, I say the Western world because we are the Christian part of the inhabited world, you know, Europe and South America and North America. We are where Christianity as a religion has taken hold and so on. And I believe, and I think most commentators believe this, that it is out of the Western world that the Antichrist will emerge.

There is a spiritual atmosphere growing within the evangelical movement. Let's get it down a little closer to home. Seeds have been planted in our church culture that are beginning to take root or have taken root and are beginning to grow into shoots, tender plants.

This isn't a positive. This is something hideous like poison ivy, you know. I mean, this is horrible.

There's something that is growing up within the evangelical culture that is making way for this great falling away. It's happening right now before our eyes. You and I are victims of this thing.

You have been influenced by false teachings far more than you probably realize. I have been influenced by false teachings far more than I probably realize. Now, I'm going to get to the body of my message here.

And, you know, let me just say this as, you know, kind of a precursor. Because of spending the last 25 years or more as a biblical counselor and being heavily involved in the personal lives of many people, you know, especially those, of course, who have dealt with sexual sin and so on, you know, I've learned some

things about people who deceive themselves. And so I'll just bring out three things about the people who are perishing that we're talking about this morning.

Number one is this. These people will hate the truth because it exposes who they really are inside. The picture here, as I already mentioned, is that God is offering people a love for the truth.

It's the same as the word of the cross. He's offering that to people in a million different ways. He offers it not just in this place, but out there in the church world.

The Lord knows how to do it. He offers this to people, this spiritual gift, if I could put it that way, a disposition, a discernment. And people are either going to embrace it, that word of the cross, or they'll count it as foolishness, as something not worth bothering with and reject it.

Jesus said, anybody who does wrong hates the light and keeps away from it for fear, for fear, for fear his deeds may be exposed. I would even take it a little bit further and say for fear that they will be seen for what they really are. You know, this is just the way it works in the Christian realm, in the real Christian realm, okay? Not necessarily out there in church world, maybe, you know, to some degree or another and depending on the quality of the church and the godliness of the pastor and so on.

But basically, the Lord comes in with a word and that word should shine its light on a person's heart. That's what the word of the cross does. It shines the light.

The Holy Spirit uses that word to expose what is in us for a purpose. You know, and those who see inside themselves and realize it's the Lord and come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and respond to that conviction and start going down through the steps of repentance to change those things that God is pointing out and dealing with, those people come to love the truth even if it hurts. Why? Because they see what is inside them and they want to be rid of it and they want to be rid of it more than they want their comfort, if I could say it like that.

It means more to them to be freed up inside than it does to protect their image and to think the best about themselves and all those other things. But again, you know, it's an either-or thing. People tend to be one camp or the other.

I can't tell you how many times, you know, I don't want to make it a self thing, but how many times my heart has been broken over people who, you know, you really pour yourself into them, you pray, you pray, you pray for them and you see them come up to that cross and reject it. You know, anytime you're involved in people's lives and you are bringing truth to them, you're going to experience that. That's just the way it is.

It really boils down to wisdom or the lack of wisdom because, you know, what is the fool but someone who lives for the moment, right? Isn't that what foolish people do? They live for the moment. Well, that makes me uncomfortable. Well, I don't want to see that.

I'm better than that, you know, and just all the thousands of deflecting things that we say to minimize or justify or rationalize or blame shift, all the things that we do to get that light off of us. You know, that whatever version that was, I read that, that they would believe the false. You know what the false is? The greatest falsehood that is going to drag professing Christians off into sin, the greatest falsehood is that I'm a good person.

That is the greatest falsehood and the people who go the first and furthest with the Lord are those who realize how wicked their hearts are, how great their need is for the Lord. People that live with that reality go very far in the kingdom of God. All right, number two, these people will come to the point of being deceived through a process.

You know, in other words, no one begins life deceived. You know, we have a sinful disposition, it's true, but we have also a blank slate. And so you begin life, but what happens is you start making choices.

One choice after another, after another. There's a track record and people who end up way over here, it's because way back here, they started making bad choices, bad decisions. And you know, it just takes them in a direction.

Look at the life of Solomon. He's a great example. He began in the right way.

You know, the Lord appeared to him on two separate occasions. And the first time the Lord appeared to him, the Lord said, you know, basically offered him anything he wanted. Who wouldn't want that? You know, kind of an offer from the Lord.

And he really said the right thing. I mean, he really responded in the right way. He could have had anything, riches, fame, anything.

But instead of asking for something that would feed his flesh, the thing he asked for is, Lord, I'm so dumb, you know, I don't have any spiritual discernment. I don't know how I'm going to lead your people in the right way. Can you give me wisdom to lead your people? And God was so pleased and blessed by that response.

And so, you know, you know what happens. And Solomon builds the temple and he leads the people into a mighty day of revival. And they're sacrificing thousands of oxen and sheep.

And he leads the people in this powerful prayer. And God's Shekinah glory falls upon the temple to where the priests have to go running out of the building. They can't take it.

It's so powerful. Now, how do you think that would affect you if that happened with you sometime? You know, I thank God that nothing like that's ever happened in my life because I don't think I could handle it. And the Lord knew that that put Solomon in a bad spot in a way.

So he comes to him again. He appears to him a second time. And some think it was that very night.

You know, right when you're just all puffed up, look at what I brought about, you know. Right then, it seems that the Lord came to him. That's when it happened.

And what did the Lord do? He warned him, don't go astray. Because if you do, your life is going to be destroyed. That was very merciful of the Lord to do.

But in that same chapter, what did Solomon do? He married the Pharaoh's daughter. Broke one of the commandments, you know, to marry, intermarry with the heathen. Immediately, it seems, I mean, it really happened sometime later.

But it didn't take long before he started going down a wrong path. And then it was pretty soon some Ammonite woman, and then some Amorite woman, and so on and so on. And before you know it, he's got,

is it 600 wives and 300 concubines? It took him one step at a time down a path.

And you know, at the very end of his life, he's worshiping demons, which is very comparable to many, I know this sounds ridiculous, many Christians, professing Christians, before it's over with, are going to be worshiping the Antichrist and the devil. That is ridiculous. How could you say that? First of all, because that's what the Bible says.

That's where we're headed. But also, because of a lot of experience. How could it happen? How could Solomon go from there to there? How could Christians sit in church and hear the gospel all their lives and end up over there? It's because it's a path.

And here's how it works. You know, this is the straight and narrow. Let's say me walking straight ahead, but somewhere along, you know, you're going straight or whatever, and you take a step over here.

And then pretty soon you take another step over here. And another. And here's the thing I want you to see about this.

This straight and narrow over here is where God's grace is, where his, the knowledge of his truth is, where the reality of God exists is on this straight and narrow. And every step that you take away from that, you are separating yourself from that influence towards godliness. And you know, what happens is the further over here you get, every step you take, your mindset is changing a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more.

Your perceptions, your opinions, your attitudes change a little bit more, a little bit more, a little bit more. I'm telling you guys, that is how it happens. I hear Mike back here, amening me.

And his story is a perfect picture of that. He was a guy that was on fire for the Lord when he first came to the Lord. But before it was over with, he was in the deepest, darkest sin and had become so far removed from God that he couldn't even connect with the Lord anymore.

Completely backslidden inside. You would have never thought that would happen to you, would you? But I'm telling you, there was just the slightest thread of faith left inside Mike, and God was able to pull him back from the brink of destruction, praise the Lord. And he did it in this place.

Number three, these people will have the attitude they cannot be deceived. That attitude, that smugness, that arrogance, that false sense of confidence based in self is the very thing that puts them in an extremely vulnerable position spiritually. Listen, if you would have went to Solomon, the day, that great and awesome day that the Shekinah glory filled the temple, and he was just glowing.

And you know what I mean? It was in the right spirit. He was thrilled, just like we're thrilled the way the Lord comes here at times. It just thrills your soul.

Now, just imagine if the Lord would have taken me on some time machine backwards instead of forwards and taken me to Solomon on that very day, that evening, let's say. And Solomon, I want to tell you something. Here's where you're going to end up.

You're going to end up worshiping demons. How believable would that have been? But we have this attitude in the church that I can't be deceived. You know, that's the very deception of it.

I can't be deceived. I am so in with God. I have such a grasp of doctrinal truth.

I am so aware of what's going on in the spiritual realm. I can't be deceived. What a different attitude Oswald Chambers had.

He said, I have determined to take no one seriously but God. And the first person I have to leave severely alone as being the greatest fraud I have ever known is myself. That is a man who understands his heart.

That is a man who's on safe ground. A number of months ago, I gave a message here about the apostasy, and I used the illustration of something that Gandalf said in the movie, The Lord of the Rings. Gandalf was explaining the ring to Frodo, if I remember right, and he said, the ring wants to be found.

You know, like there's a power in the ring that desires to be located by Sauron, this evil thing. Sauron, right? That's his name. And what I said in that message was, your heart wants to be deceived.

And if you think you can't be deceived, you're already halfway there. One of the reasons why Christians think they will never be deceived by the Antichrist and all of that is because of this entire fantasy that we have built up in the church through novels and movies and so on about the coming Antichrist and what it's going to be like. We've got it all figured out.

We practically know what he's going to look like. We know how he's going to talk. He's going to be a liberal and a humanist, of course, right? He's going to be all into the new age movement.

Everyone knows these things. No, dear ones, it may not be like they have presented to us. You know, part of the problem is they haven't taken into account the great falling away.

Where is that in any of these movies and books? They're all so positive. And, you know, Christians who do all the right things, they're good Rush Limbaugh listeners and, you know, solid conservatives. And they go to the right church and they believe the right doctrines and they sing the right songs.

How could I be deceived? Yeah, but Jesus and Paul both talked about a great falling away where many will be deceived. The majority, maybe. Let me tell you that the truth that's being offered, the love of the truth is not our skewed version of Christianity that is being presented out there that is so tied in with our worldliness and our love for the earth life and the way we have fitted into our daily lives and made Christianity just one more segment of American life.

That is not the truth that is being offered. The truth that is being offered is the reality of your relationship with Jesus Christ. The reality of your soul, the reality of your heart, the reality of the inner change and the inner relationship with God that you have.

That's the truth. We have so dumbed down God that we have made him like us. And we think he's some kind of cosmic fool that we can just get away with whatever.

We lie to ourselves. We lie to ourselves. You know, my definition of a self-deceived person is someone who creates their own reality.

You know, they just paint this picture in their mind. Oh, this is me. I'm a God-loving man.

And, you know, I do all these things right. I love the Lord. I walk with the Lord.

And they create this delusionary fantasy about themselves full of self-confidence and self-trust and self-belief. And then they just kind of act out that part to other people around them, creating your own

reality. But I want to tell you, dear ones, God is looking at your heart.

He's looking at the motives of your heart. He's looking at your attitudes. He's looking at what you want in life, what drives you, where you're headed, the momentum of your heart.

Those are the things that God's looking at. And those are the things that will come forth on judgment day, not all your little religious activities. God is a God of truth, pure truth.

Now, I'm going to wrap this up, and I just want to do it by reading a few verses. God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth.

Psalms 145. God desires truth in the innermost being. Psalm 51.

The Lord dwells with He who speaks truth in His heart. Psalm 15. But there's some other verses I need to read also.

There will be those who have gone astray from the truth. 1 Timothy 2. There will be those who are always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 2 Timothy 3. There will be those who will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

2 Timothy 4. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all who suppress the truth. Romans 1. And finally, out of Hebrews 10. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a terrifying expectation of judgment.

Now, I want to leave you with this thought. People are deceived when their desire for what's being offered to them exceeds their desire and love for the truth. People are deceived when their desire for what's being offered to them.

Now, who's doing the offering? False teachers. The devil's agents. When they're being offered what they're being offered exceeds their desire and love for the truth.

We all have to grapple with that. I have to grapple with that. If I've made it sound like your salvation is precarious, I'm glad.

I'm good. That's what I wanted to do. Because I know that there are those in this room who have fought through to have something real in the Lord.

And their confidence is not going to be shaken by a message like this. This message is aimed for those who have a false level of confidence. Whose confidence is built on something other than truth and coming to grips with the truth.

The Lord is making an offer to all of us. He will give us the discernment to be able to tell the truth from the false. He will give that to us.

He will give us a disposition to be able to examine our hearts and see the reality of where we are. But we have to be willing to accept that. To receive it from Him.

Lord, I just pray that this little message will have awakened some desire within people's hearts to examine their hearts. To allow the Holy Spirit to show them the things that are within their hearts. That align

themselves with the enemy.

Lord, I know for myself, I want to know. I don't care what it costs me. I want to know what is inside me.

Is there anything inside me that wants what the enemy is going to offer? Expose it if it's there, Lord. And give me the grace to repent of it, I pray. I can't change myself, Lord.

But I can respond to your offers. I can acknowledge the truth that you present to me about who Steve Gallagher really is inside. And I can accept the lordship of Christ to reign over my heart and life.

I can submit myself to you, Lord. I can allow you to live your life through me. And I desire that, Lord.

I desire that. And I pray for all of those who are listening here today. Dear God, please, Lord, awaken those who have gone asleep.

Awaken them, Lord. Shake them out of their spiritual slumber and bring them into a knowledge of the truth and into a love of the truth. Whatever it may require.

I thank you, Lord. We bring this all to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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