

Being Firmly Established in the Faith

2 Thessalonians 2:11-17

2 Thessalonians 2:11-17 - *“And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, ¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

¹³ But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, ¹⁴ to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”

Background Notes

In verses 1-10 of this chapter, the apostle Paul proved to the Thessalonian believers that they should not think **the** Tribulation period (or any part of the Day of the Lord) had arrived - even though they were undergoing severe tribulation and persecutions. The future Day of the Lord cannot come, Paul wrote, unless some specific prophetic events take place. The first event will be a great apostasy, or a wholesale falling away from the faith. Second, “the man of sin,” or the antichrist, must be revealed. Third, “the Restrainer of lawlessness” - the Holy Spirit - will be removed at the time of the Rapture.

Therefore, if no prophetic signs must be fulfilled before the Rapture takes place, the Rapture **must** occur before the coming of the Day of the Lord. And the Rapture must occur before the Tribulation period, which is the first part of that future Day of the Lord.

This teaching is really a straightforward approach to the study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. It practices that important hermeneutical (interpretation) principle, “The Clarity of Scripture.” It’s logical. It’s not convoluted. It’s not forced. It fits with the rest of the Scriptures that deal with future events. And it answered all the questions of the Thessalonian believers.

Notice, however - Paul indicated that it is possible to be deceived. Verses 2-3: *“Not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means.”* The Thessalonian believers might be deceived and misled about these matters in three ways: first, by spirit of prophecy; second, by word, message or report; and third, by forged letter.

This is just as true today as it was then, so be warned. Just because someone says that the Holy Spirit revealed a “truth” to him or her doesn’t mean it is true! Did anyone ever tell you that they had the “last word” or “a new truth” on some subject - because the Lord told them? Well, before you believe it, make sure the Lord “tells you,” too - through His Word! Just because a message or sermon sounds good or it moves you emotionally doesn’t mean it’s 100% true. It must be

checked out with Scripture. Just because something is written down in a book or a letter doesn't mean it's more authoritative. Every message, lecture, sermon, letter, etc, **must** line up with **Scripture**.

Recently a Christian wrote me a very lengthy letter with some impressive supposed "documentation" that the Genesis Flood of Noah's day was only a "localized" flood. The only problem with that view is that it goes against the clear teaching of Scripture! The Bible clearly teaches that the Genesis Flood was a **global** Flood. (In this connection, read 2 Peter 3, as well as the Genesis account.)

The coming antichrist will do miracles and wonders: *"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish"(v9-10)*. Notice that these signs and wonders will not be done through God's power, but rather *"according to the working of Satan"* – through Satan's power. People can easily be deceived by signs and wonders that are not of God – in fact, even believers can be deceived.

The context of verse 9 is teaching about the future, but it's possible that signs and wonders not from God can be performed even now. In Matthew 7:22-23 our Lord said: *"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* Notice the signs and wonders were done "in the name of Jesus" - but they are not of God!

Don't be deceived by signs and wonders! Check everything out with Scripture.

In the second half of chapter 2, Paul taught about an End Times form of deception called "the lie." *"God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie."* What's this all about?

Doctrinal Points

1. People who will not believe, cannot believe.

How many of you have read the "Left Behind" book series? In those books, conversions occur after the Rapture. People who had formerly rejected the gospel are portrayed as being saved following the Rapture. How does this concept line up with Scripture?

Although we can't be dogmatic on this subject, the verses before us seem to indicate that those who reject the gospel before the Rapture will not get a second chance after the Rapture. Let's read verses 9-12 together, and as we read, remember that the context is the Day of the Lord – which will come **after** the Rapture. *"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they **all** may be condemned who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (v9-12, emphasis added).*

The book of Revelation teaches that some people will come to saving faith during the Tribulation period, both Jews and Gentiles. But it appears that these "Tribulation believers" will be people who had never previously heard the gospel - or at

least who had never rejected the gospel. 2 Thessalonians 2 seems to indicate that those who rejected the gospel before the Rapture **will not** change their minds - and **cannot** change their minds, because of a powerful delusion sent by God Himself.

Notice - verse 12 says "**all**" of them. Because of this deluding influence, the rejecters of the gospel will believe "the lie." But what is "the lie"? We don't know! Perhaps "the lie" will be a sensational explanation for all the missing people around the world who "disappeared" at the Rapture. For example: "Maybe they were taken by extraterrestrials from outer space!" Or – "Maybe The Force removed the intolerant, bigoted Christians who were hindering the progressive movement towards one-world government!" However, most likely, "the lie" is the antichrist's lie – the lie that he is God.

Notice that God is not the author of the lie. God is never the author of what is false. However, God is the source of that which blinds unbelievers to the truth – the truth that they already rejected. This teaching may disturb you, but it's a divine principle. Remember what our Lord said to the disciples who asked Him why He spoke to the rejecting Pharisees in parables? Matthew 13:13-14: *"Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive.'"*

So "people who **will not** believe, **cannot** believe" is a divine principle, not just during the coming Tribulation period, but now as well. People who **will not** believe **cannot** believe.

2. People who do believe, must believe.

Verses 13-14: *"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

In these two verses, the great truth of the sovereignty of God in the election of some people for salvation is taught. In addition, the great truth of the responsibility of all people to believe the gospel when it is presented to them is also taught. These truths are **not** contradictory! They are complementary. Both are true. It is beyond our finite comprehension how these truths fit together, but **both are true**.

When the gospel was presented to the Thessalonians, they had the responsibility to believe for salvation. Now Paul was telling these believers that they had been **chosen** and **set apart** by God - from the beginning! We believe that "*from the beginning*" means this took place in eternity past, in the eternal counsels of God. Ephesians 1:4: *"just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."*

Don't let these complementary truths disturb you! Both are true. From our finite human perspective, they appear to be contradictory - but they're not! Beyond our finite human comprehension? Yes. Contradictory? No. Everyone who is saved through the gospel of Jesus must believe the gospel. The Bible teaches that those who do believe, must believe.

Practical Application

Don't hold the wrong traditions!

Verses 15-17: *"Hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."*

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonian believers to stand firm and *"hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle"*(v15). What did the apostle mean when he said, *"hold the traditions?"* What kind of **traditions**?

Not long ago, I heard a Christian use this verse as a "biblical proof text" or supposed "biblical reason" for not changing the traditional order of services at his church. This Christian wanted the times of the services, and the order of the services, and length of the services to remain just as they were when the church was founded - fifty years ago! Why? Because we are to **"hold the traditions"**! That was a **bad** interpretation of that verse! As we say in my biblical interpretation class at Emmaus, it was **"BAD hermeneutics!"**

Notice that Paul told the Thessalonians to hold **the traditions that were taught by the apostle**, whether by word or by letter. The traditions Paul taught are now Scripture, and we should definitely hold these Bible-based traditions. But traditions that are manmade, or legalistic, or "the way it's always been done," or not properly backed up by Scripture, can be very dangerous. The Lord strongly denounced the Pharisees for their prideful performance of their man-made legalistic traditions – and for denouncing those who didn't follow their traditions! Are there present-day Pharisees in our churches today?

We should hold on to **biblical** traditions! And closely examine other traditions to see if they are truly biblical - because some of them may actually hinder the work of the Lord. **Don't hold the wrong traditions!**