



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

July 26, 2009
English Standard Version

“Deception that’s Unmasked”

This is the 13th sermon in the series on 1 & 2 Thessalonians entitled,
“Life for the Long Haul.”

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

“Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Heavenly Father, we have come to Your Word again this morning and we find that we still need to learn a lot about what it means to love the truth. We know we’re susceptible to lies and delusions ... that we’re not as faithful to Your Word as You want us to be. So Lord, once again

open our eyes and ears to truly hear and understand and apply this Word to our lives. Use it to help us know and love the truth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Do this for each of us, this morning, in His name, and for His glory, Amen.

INTRODUCTION: *Last Days Delusions*¹

Just the other day I got an email from Dr. Dan Wallace, who's a New Testament scholar, and he was responding to a whole slew of emails and videos and letters, all dealing with the topic of ... *Is Obama the Antichrist?* And so Dr. Wallace wrote a long collective response to these people, extensively quoting from the Scriptures, and definitively showing that this is **NOT** the case.

He was far more gracious than I would have been. He didn't use the words 'stupid,' or 'moron,' or 'idiot,' or even use any negative phrases about the people asking this question, as I did in an email to a friend recently, asking him if he was a "selfish, non-contributing, life-sucking, grace-lacking, painfully dying loser?"

Dr. Wallace didn't say anything like that.

What he did say ... after a long Biblical tour of all those passages dealing with the Antichrist ... was this, "But is he [Obama] the Antichrist? In the least, the linguistic torturing required to make the **biblical** evidence say this is beyond the pale of reason and, perhaps, sanity."

We live in an age when far too many Christians learn their doctrine from Christian novels and from American popular culture. This is a really sad situation because Christians are supposed to learn their doctrine from the pages of Scripture. And one doctrine where far too much Christian thinking is informed by bad fiction and low culture, as opposed to the Scriptures, is this doctrine of the Antichrist.

In those circles where Christians are especially interested in Bible prophecy and the relationship between current events and end times, it's common to hear people engaging in speculation about the dreaded archenemy of Jesus Christ.

- Is the Antichrist already alive?
- How will he deceive Israel into making a peace treaty with the nations of a revived Roman Empire?
- Will Christians be around to face this dreaded foe? Or will they be removed from the earth by the rapture before the seven-year tribulation begins, leaving only those "**Left Behind**" to face the wrath of the Antichrist?
- What is "*the mark of the beast*"? Is it tied to some current technology?

And so on and so forth, until I want to gag and throw up.

Now much of this speculation is promoted by those who believe in **dispensational premillennialism**, which is the system of understanding the end times set forth in the poorly written, but hugely successful, *Left Behind* novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Sadly, the dispensational approach to prophecy in general, and to the doctrine of the antichrist in particular, has **drifted far away** from the teaching of Scripture.

Now there are **four primary places** in Scripture which deal with this subject of the antichrist. Obviously the Book of Revelation, which we will begin to go through next month,

¹ The Introduction is adapted from *The Man of Sin: Uncovering the Truth about the Antichrist* by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, pages 9-36. Dr. Daniel Wallace quote comes from his email letter "*Is Obama the Antichrist?*" Reclaiming the Mind Ministries, 8/15/09. You can find his letter as a blog post at <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2009/08/2823/>

and we'll be there for a while.

Second, the book of Daniel, which we went through last spring.

Third, the Epistles of John, which we went through last year.

And finally, **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**, which is our text for this morning.

Now because this text is easily one of **the most difficult and hard to understand texts in all the Bible**, it would be really easy to just say it's too hard and skip over it. In fact, in my research, I found a number of other preachers and commentators who did just that. They just said that this passage was really hard and so they skipped it and went on to the next passage. But as one who's committed to expository preaching through books of the Bible, that's not an option for me. I think you have to deal with the hard texts.

A good friend who's a PCA Pastor in Columbia, South Carolina wrote me on Facebook to suggest that I title this sermon and the upcoming series on Revelation, "I'm confused about this and so now I'm going to teach it to you."

Yeah ... I thanked him for that.

Now I do need to say that I'm preaching this morning as a Presbyterian and Reformed Pastor who is committed to an **amillennial eschatology**. I believe that the church has faced a series of antichrists from the time of the apostles and that this series of antichrists will eventually culminate in the appearance of **the** Antichrist immediately before the return of Christ at the end of the age.

This future appearance of the Antichrist reflects the fact that he is a **false Messiah** who mimics the work of Christ, thus deceiving many. And the appearance of this Antichrist is the final precursor, harbinger, foreshadowing of the coming of Jesus Christ at the end of the age to judge the world, raise the dead, and make all things new.

And so with all that said, let's dive into our text for today, and let's let our theology, our beliefs, our faith ... be informed by the Word of God. The Apostle Paul finally gets to the meat of this letter to a young church that's confused, that's persecuted, and to some degree, is living in fear. And so the Apostle starts by reminding them that he has warned them about ...

v. 1-2: FALSE TEACHING²

"Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers,² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come."

This section is the heart of the letter. It's most likely the reason for the letter. It focuses on some errors in their thinking regarding the return of Christ. Just as this subject was the central issue in 1st Thessalonians, it's the central issue in 2nd Thessalonians as well. We can't minimize the importance that the Second Coming was such a key theme in these first letters of Paul.

These two topics, Christ's coming to us and our going to Him, the unity of heaven and earth, were featured in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. At that time, the Thessalonians were troubled that the Second Coming hadn't come quickly enough, since some of their friends had died before it had taken place; now their problem was that they thought it had come too quickly, for some teachers were saying ***"that the day of the Lord has come."***

Apparently, the idea that the day of the Lord had already come has made the

² The Exposition of the text is adapted from *The Man of Sin* by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, pages 117-134; *The Gospel & The End of Time: The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. John R. W. Stott, pages 156-173; *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2 Thessalonians / 1, 2 Timothy / Titus* by Dr. Gary Demarest, pages 116-125; *Let's Study 1 & 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. Andrew Young, pages 140-151; *The IVP New Testament Commentary: 1-2 Thessalonians* by Dr. Greg Beale (one of my professors), pages 198-224; *ESV Study Bible Notes on 2 Thessalonians* by Dr. Colin Nicholl.

Thessalonians fear that Jesus' coming and the gathering of His people to Him were no longer legitimate or realistic expectations. The Thessalonians were *shaken* into mindless panic and were *alarmed* or frightened by the false claim that the day of the Lord had already come. Though the source of the confusion was unknown to Paul, he suggests a number of possibilities: *a spirit*, which could be an alleged prophetic word; *a spoken word*, possibly some teaching or sermon; or, most troublesome, *a letter seeming to be from us*. Paul seems to have suspected that a letter was forged in his name and was now circulating in the church.

Although some believe that the Thessalonians were thinking in terms of a complex series of events that would lead to the second coming, Paul seems to assume here, as he does in 1st Corinthians, as he does in Philippians, and as he does in 1st Thessalonians, that the arrival of the day of the Lord and the second coming of Christ, and the gathering of the saints, commonly known as the rapture, occur **at the same time**, as different aspects **of a single event**.

This is important ... because a misinterpretation of verse 1 became the genesis of dispensational theology. Around 1830, a man by the name of John Nelson Darby, a Pastor in the Plymouth Brethren Church, introduced the idea that these two phrases, "*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him*," refer to **two different events**. Thus there came into his interpretation the scheme in which there is a "rapture" portrayed in the second phrase which occurs before the Second Coming. This view of the Rapture, Jesus coming *for* His own, followed (perhaps much later) by the Second Coming, Jesus coming *with* His own, became the cornerstone of a school of thought called dispensationalism. This system is set forth in such places as the notes of the Scofield Bible, the Dake's Bible, updated in the Ryrie Study Bible, and has been popularized in more recent years by Tim LaHaye's writings.

There are no Teaching Elders in the PCA who hold to dispensationalism — you couldn't pass the ordination exams if you did. This view is predominantly found in many independent, Baptist, Brethren, and Bible churches; and it's almost exclusively **an American phenomenon**. This view of theology is found virtually nowhere else in the world. However, much of its teachings have found their way into our Christian culture, especially when dealing with end times events and the nation of Israel. All starting with **a misreading of verse 1**. I find it ironic that not understanding a warning about false teaching **has led to false teaching**.

Now let me caveat this by saying I know lots of godly dispensationalists whose piety and love for Jesus would put me to shame. It's a different view of theology, but these people are still our brothers and sisters in Christ and should be treated as such.

So Paul is telling them not to get caught up in false teaching; that the day of the lord hasn't come yet; and they'll know when it comes because it will be unmistakably preceded by ...

v. 3-5: TRUE SIGNS

"Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?"

There are two themes in these verses which demand our attention. The first is "**the rebellion**." The Greek word for rebellion is *apostasia*, from which we get our English word, "**apostasy**." The word usually refers to a religious heresy. On the basis of what follows, it is clear that Paul had already taught them about apostasy. The second phrase introduces "**the man of lawlessness**," who is also "**the son of destruction**," some versions translate this as "*the son of*

perdition.” This person is thus characterized as being opposed to God’s law and therefore destined to “*perdition*,” which is destruction. The fact that he is to be “*revealed*” places him in direct contrast to Christ, who will also be “*revealed*.”

Now part of our problem here is that we don’t know what Paul is assuming his readers know. He’s not giving them new information here, but reminding them of what he taught them when he was with them, verse 5, “***Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?***” Our problem is that we don’t know what he said then, and so we have to admit, what we struggle to understand, his readers would have clearly understood. While this is new to us, and appears nowhere else in the New Testament, this is just a **reminder** to them.

What Paul does for them, and for us, is to clarify the order of future events. “***The Day of the Lord***” cannot be here already, he says, because ***that day will not come*** until two other things have happened. A certain event must take place, and a certain person must appear. The event he calls “***the rebellion***” and the person “***the man of lawlessness***,” the rebel. Although Paul does not call him **the Antichrist**, this is evidently who he is. He will be in the world before he emerges into public view. But only when the rebel ***is revealed*** will the rebellion break out.

The Apostle John writes of the expectation of his coming in **1 John 2:18**, “*Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.*”

Therefore we see that the day of the Lord will be preceded by two events, neither of which has been fulfilled. The first prerequisite is a rebellion of humanity as a whole against God. Just as humanity in Adam has rejected God and has been plunged into ever greater depths of sin as a result, as we can see in Romans 1, so it will move into all-out rebellion against God when the Antichrist, “***the man of lawlessness***” is revealed. This second prerequisite will personify hostility to God and His revelation. This man is “***the son of destruction***,” the one whose destiny is to be defeated and destroyed when Jesus returns.

Now the warning here is not to be deceived. Jesus Himself gave us a similar warning in **Matthew 24:12** when He said, “*And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.*”

Now there’s this unique phrase in verse 4 about “***the man of lawlessness***” who “*takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.*” This mention of “***the temple of God***” has led many to believe Paul’s talking about the literal temple in Jerusalem. This has led many to believe that this part of the prophecy has already been fulfilled in 70 A.D.

Yet Paul **never** uses the term this way. The word ‘temple’ is found nine other times in the New Testament outside of 2nd Thessalonians, where it’s almost always used of Christ or the church. In all the other times Paul uses the word, it **never** refers to the literal temple in Jerusalem, either past or future, but rather, Paul uses it to refer to believers who constitute the temple of God because they are in union with Christ, through faith.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, “*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.*”

1 Corinthians 6:18-19, “*Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?*”

2 Corinthians 6:16, “*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,*

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Ephesians 2:19-21, “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,* ²¹ *in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”*

Therefore, on the basis of how Paul uses the word ‘*temple*’ in all his letters, we can see that he’s not talking about the temple in Jerusalem (either the one destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. or some future temple yet to be rebuilt). Paul is instead using the temple as a metaphor for the church, since the church is now indwelt by the Spirit of God in this present age.

The Apostle goes on to encourage them not to fear because *the man of lawlessness* is being held under ...

v. 6-7: REAL RESTRAINT

“And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.”

Now if there wasn’t controversy over “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him*” in verse 1, “*the day of the Lord*” in verse 2, “*the rebellion*” and “*the man of lawlessness*” in verse 3, “*the temple of God*” in verse 4, and Paul’s previous instructions in verse 5, we come now to “*what is restraining him*” in verse 6. I love passages that are so clear that all Christians everywhere agree on what they mean. Sadly, this isn’t one of them.

Paul makes it clear that the Thessalonians already know “*what is restraining him*” and preventing “*the man of lawlessness*” from appearing on the scene. Obviously the Thessalonians knew what Paul meant, but we must do our best to make an educated guess. In his commentary, Dr. Greg Beale identifies seven different interpretations of these verses.

Still, most Reformed theologians hold that “*what is restraining him*” is **the Providence of God**, specifically presented through **the preaching of the gospel**, as **empowered by the Holy Spirit**, that is holding back the power of lawlessness until the end. This fits the context of the passage, since we know that Paul’s preaching was already having an impact upon the forces of darkness — which explains why Satan was trying to hinder him — but it also fits with Jesus’ words in **Mark 13:10** that the gospel must first be preached to all nations before His return. Indeed, our Lord promised in **Matthew 16:18** that the gates of hell will not prevail against His church.

The Apostle wants them to know that God is restraining such evil until the proper time, which is the time of final judgment. Therefore, the Thessalonians shouldn’t be taken in by such obvious false teaching as they were hearing.

Meanwhile, even during the period of restraint, and before the lawless one is revealed, we’re told that “*the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.*” For those of you who have the NIV, the Not Inspired Version, they totally mess up this verse, translating the Greek word *mystērion* as “*secret power.*” It’s just a bad translation. The word is ‘*mystery,*’ meaning we don’t fully see it or understand it. In fact, this form of lawlessness seems illogical and irrational to us.

Dr. John R. W. Stott says that we detect its subversive influence around us today — in the atheistic stance of secular humanism, in the totalitarian tendencies of extreme ideologies, in the materialism of the consumer society which puts things in the place of God, in those so-called

‘theologies’ which proclaim the end of moral absolutes, and in the social permissiveness which cheapens the sanctity of human life, sex, marriage and family, all of which God created or instituted.

Were it not for some remaining restraints (which preserve a measure of justice, freedom, order and decency) these things would break out much more than they already have. And one day they will break out totally uncontrolled. For when the restraint is removed, then secret subversion will become open rebellion under the unscrupulous leadership of **“the man of lawlessness.”** However, when that day comes, it will soon be followed by the return of the King and His ...

v. 8-12: TRIUMPHANT REVELATION

“And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of His coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Here for the third time we’re told that **“the lawless one will be revealed.”** Paul is using language that seems to be deliberately pointing out that this **lawless one** is **a counterfeit redeemer** with **a counterfeit revealing**, mocking the **true** redeemer and the **true** revelation of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore the scene depicted by Paul is one in which **“the man of lawlessness”** (who mimics Christ) deceives people within the believing community (the church) through, verse 9, **“the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.”**

And because of that deception we find that verses 10–12 portray the pathetic progression of sin and evil within the human heart. First is the rejection of the love of truth which comes from giving in to the deception of unrighteousness. And how deceptive and appealing unrighteousness can be. The ancient story of the temptation in Genesis rings so true! The serpent is attractive. The appeals are enticing because they offer wisdom, goodness, and life. The tempter is not so stupid as to try to lure us with offers of ignorance, evil, and death. The appeal of sin is that it promises so many wonderful things.

The rejection of the love of truth progresses readily to delusion and believing **“the lie.”** How easily we get to believing that evil is good, that darkness is light, that might makes right, that hate is love. Believing the lie is the final stage of the triumph of evil.

It is of great importance to observe that the opposite of **‘believing the truth’** is **“pleasure in unrighteousness.”** This is because the truth has moral implications and makes moral demands. Evil, not error, is the root problem. The whole process is grimly logical. First, they take **“pleasure in unrighteousness,”** or, as one version has it, they ‘make sinfulness their deliberate choice.’ Secondly, they refuse to believe and love the truth (because it is impossible to love evil and truth simultaneously). Thirdly, Satan gets in and deceives them. Fourthly, God himself **‘sends’** them a strong delusion, giving them over to the lie they have chosen. Fifthly, they are condemned and perish.

This is extremely solemn passage. It tells us that the downward slippery path begins with a love for evil, and then leads successively to a rejection of truth, the deception of the devil, a judicial hardening by God, and final condemnation. These, then, are the dynamics which lie behind the final rebellion. The only way to be protected from being deceived **is to love the**

truth.

The condemnation of God is seen as a just consequence of our choice to reject the truth and to find pleasure in unrighteousness. We're back again to the reality that our choices and behavior do have lasting significance. In the deepest sense, this life is the arena in which we either follow the way of God or the way of *the lawless one*. And for those who think this whole following Christ thing is unclear, remember that not to follow the way of God is to follow the way of *the lawless one*. Sometimes the way of compromise or procrastination is indeed a rejection of the truth.

Now in Paul's discussion of *the lawless one*, there seems to be a loud echo from Daniel 11 & 12. As I'm sure you remember, the prophet Daniel foresaw a time in the future when the daily sacrifice will cease and God's temple will be desecrated, which happened at least twice, in 167 B.C. and again in 70 A.D. But the prophet Daniel also speaks of the final enemy of God who both deceives the people of God and causes them to forsake the covenant, which is apostasy, or rebellion against God. Daniel's prophecy is clearly in Paul's mind when he speaks of "*the rebellion*" and "*the man of lawlessness.*" But it seems that both Daniel and Paul are clearly assigning this particular figure to the time of the end.

So when Paul warns the Thessalonians of someone to come who, verse 4, "*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.*" Paul is talking about an end-times individual who will commit this heinous act in Christ's church, not in the Jerusalem temple, past or future. Therefore this great apostasy, this rebellion, will occur in Christ's church in connection with the revealing of this false-Christ, this antichrist, this "*man of lawlessness,*" who will exalt himself over God and demand to be worshiped. This may indicate that the series of antichrists described by the Apostle John in 1 John 2 will give way to **the** Antichrist once God's restraint is lifted.

This means that the lifting of the restraint has for its goal, not merely the revealing of *the man of lawlessness*, but the final judgment upon all the forces of evil. This, too, is strong evidence that the events of 70 A.D. do not fulfill this prophecy. This point becomes stronger when we realize that Paul is quoting from a text in which Yahweh, the mighty warrior, is said to judge the whole earth. **Isaiah 11:4**, "*but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.*"

The man of lawlessness will be destroyed by the glory of the coming of the Lord. Jesus is that mighty warrior of whom Isaiah spoke, and when His glory is revealed it will be to judge the earth. That this event, the revealing and then the destruction of the man of lawlessness, is tied to the Second Coming of Christ is made clear at the end of our passage, "*Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*"

God's judgment comes upon all those who have embraced His enemy through the form of a powerful delusion, so that all who are taken in by the man of lawlessness are therefore objects of final judgment. Divine condemnation is the ultimate fate of those who are already perishing.

The preterists are wrong when they assert that all of this has already happened. The dispensationalists are wrong when they assert that it will only happen in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. No, Paul's man of sin presides over an end-times apostasy in Christ's church. He's the culmination of that series of antichrists already plaguing the apostolic church, both then and

now, and his power is presently being restrained by the preaching of the gospel, until such time as God lifts His supernatural restraint and *“the man of lawlessness”* is finally revealed. And when that day comes, the Second Coming of Christ will not be far behind.

However, since no one knows when the Lord will return [Matthew 24:36, *“But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”*]; and His coming must be preceded by certain signs, such as the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth [Matthew 24:14, *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*]; and which would include the revealing of *the lawless one*, then Christians must always be ready and shouldn't be preoccupied with setting dates. In this warning, Paul is clearly echoing the teachings of Jesus.

These early Christians lived with a distinct and pronounced eschatological tension — the Lord has died, the Lord has risen, the Lord has ascended (the already), but the Lord will come again (the not yet). This tension is clearly taught by both Jesus and Paul to prevent both date-setting and idleness.

CONCLUSION: *Truth Matters*³

Now it's easy to look back at the Thessalonian church and think that they weren't all that sharp. Paul has already taught them on this subject and wrote about it to other churches, as did the Apostle John.

But before we get to confident in ourselves and in our church ... we have to remind ourselves that there are numerous false teachings sprouting up in the churches today. When there is less of a focus on the content of the Bible in Christian Education, whether in Sunday School or in Seminary ... and everything in between ... then the church becomes a fertile ground for the seeds of false teaching to be planted. The lesson to be learned is that the contemporary church, like the early church, is **plagued with deceptive teachings** ... now more than ever.

On May 5, 1994, Michael Novak received the twenty-fourth Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and addressed the assembly at Westminster Abbey with a message titled *“Awakening from Nihilism.”* It is a scathing attack on the horrific effects of relativism in the twentieth century. Of all the lessons that can be learned from the past hundred years the first is this ... **“Truth matters.”**

His assessment of the fundamental problem today ... “One principle that today's intellectuals most passionately disseminate is vulgar relativism, “Nihilism with a happy face.” For them it is certain that there is no truth, only opinion: my opinion, your opinion. They abandon the defense of the intellect. ... Those who surrender the domain of the intellect make straight the road to fascism. Totalitarianism ... is the will-to-power unchecked by any regard for truth. To surrender the claims of truth upon humans is to surrender Earth to thugs. ... Vulgar relativism is an invisible gas, odorless, deadly, that is now polluting every free society on earth. It is a gas that attacks the central nervous system of moral striving. ... “There is no such thing as truth,” they teach even the little ones. “Truth is bondage. Believe what seems right to you. There are as many truths as there are individuals. Follow your feelings. Do as you please. Get in touch with yourself. ...” Those who speak in this way prepare the jails of the 21st century. They do the work of tyrants.”

When you come to the Bible with those words ringing in your ears, it's not surprising or

³ Conclusion is adapted from Beale; *Taste and see: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* by John Piper, pages 101ff; and the article “*Awakening from Nihilism*” by Michael Novak, *First Things*, August/September 94.

oppressive, but sobering and thrilling to find that truth is central. Why? For the simple reason that **God** is central ... and God is the ground of all truth. Here is what we find. Cherish this.

Ten Reasons to Love the Truth.

1. Biblical Truth Saves.

1 Timothy 4:16, *“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”*

2. Biblical Truth Frees From Satan.

2 Timothy 2:24-26, *“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”*

3. Biblical Truth Imparts Grace And Peace.

2 Peter 1:2, *“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.”*

4. Biblical Truth Sanctifies.

John 17:17, *“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”*

2 Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*

5. Biblical Truth Serves Love.

Philippians 1:9, *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”*

6. Biblical Truth Protects From Error.

Ephesians 4:13-14, *“until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”*

7. Biblical Truth Is The Hope Of Heaven.

1 Corinthians 13:12, *“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”*

8. Biblical Truth Will Be Resisted By Some.

2 Timothy 4:3, *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”*

9. Biblical Truth, Rightly Handled, Is Approved By God.

2 Timothy 2:15, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”*

10. Biblical Truth: Continue To Grow In It!

2 Peter 3:18, *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”*

I pray that the effect of these biblical words will be a strong conviction that there is such a thing as **truth** in a world of “vulgar relativism,” and that the Bible itself is the all-decisive Word of the One who is Truth. If that conviction would take root and spread, we would not be among the number who “prepare the jails of the twenty-first century.” We would, in fact, be the true liberators, **John 8:32**, *“and you will know **the truth**, and **the truth** will set you free.”*

Consistently, Paul concludes his teaching sections on this subject with an admonition to

use the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ to comfort one another, to edify and build up the church, and to strengthen our resolve to be faithful in our service to Christ and in our love to one another. To be sure, the Second Coming of Christ may well strike fear into the hearts of unbelievers, but it is always to be a source of comfort and strength for us in Him. We are called to fidelity, not forecasting—to steady perseverance as we bear witness to our unswerving faith in the hope of His coming.

Loyalty to apostolic teaching, now permanently enshrined in the New Testament, is still the test **of truth** and the shield against error.

It was then and it is now ... because **truth matters**.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the church in Thessalonica. Thank You that they received and accepted the Word of God and so they loved the Truth. May we do the same. We ask that You would do this within each one of us ... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

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Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.