

Don't Be Deceived: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Scriptures for Today:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, **2** That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. **3** Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; **4** Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. **5** Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? **6** And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. **7** For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. **8** And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: **9** Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, **10** And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. **11** And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: **12** That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Introduction

- The title of the sermon today is "Don't Be Deceived."

[QUESTION — CAN A BELIEVER BE DECEIVED?]

- Sometimes Christians assume that because they are saved, they cannot be deceived.
- We know that a saved person cannot lose everlasting life.
- But salvation does not mean that everything we believe is automatically correct.
- A believer can misunderstand a passage.
- A believer can accept false teaching.
- A believer can become confused and troubled concerning doctrine.

[KEY LINE]

- Salvation makes us children of God, but it does not make us incapable of believing something that is wrong.

[CONTEXT]

- The Thessalonians were not people who had never heard the truth.
- Paul had personally preached the gospel to them.
- He had taught them about the coming of Jesus Christ and the gathering of believers unto Him.
- In his first letter, Paul presented that truth as a source of comfort.
- But sometime afterward, a false message concerning these events reached the church.
- Instead of resting in what Paul had taught them, the Thessalonians became shaken and troubled.
- Something intended to comfort them had become a source of confusion.

[NEXT SLIDE]

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

- Paul had given them a clear promise: Jesus Christ would return, the dead in Christ would rise, and believers would be gathered together unto Him.
- His conclusion was, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”
- Yet when Paul wrote his second letter, these believers were no longer comforted.
- A false teaching about the coming of Christ had unsettled their minds.
- Paul wrote to correct that error and bring them back to what God had actually revealed.
- We will examine the details of what happened when we begin with verses 1 and 2.

[IMPORTANT TO NOTICE]

- Paul was writing to saved people.
- These believers had heard the truth and had been personally taught by Paul.
- Yet false teaching concerning the coming of Christ had still shaken and troubled them.
- The fact that Paul needed to correct them shows that believers can be deceived concerning doctrine.
- False teaching had taken a truth meant to comfort them, and turned it into something that troubled them.

[HOW DECEPTION WORKS]

- This helps us understand why deception is so dangerous.
- The Thessalonians were not disturbed by something they immediately recognized as false.
- Whatever they had heard appeared believable.
- It sounded convincing enough to shake those who had already been taught the truth.
- Deception does not normally introduce itself as deception.
- If every lie clearly looked like a lie, very few people would believe it.
- False teaching often appears spiritual.
- It may be presented by someone who sounds confident and knowledgeable.
- It may come from someone we trust.
- A person may be correct about many doctrines and still be mistaken about another one.
- False teaching may be supported by an interpretation that sounds reasonable.
- That is what makes deception so dangerous.

When we hear something, the final question shouldn't be , “Who said it?”

The final question must be, “What does the Bible say?”

[APPLICATION]

- God gives us pastors and teachers to help us understand His Word.
- We should listen carefully when the Bible is preached.
- But no preacher, teacher, church, or religious tradition takes the place of Scripture.
- Every teaching must be examined by the Word of God.
- That does not mean we refuse to listen to teachers or assume that we have nothing to learn from anyone else.
- It means that every person who teaches the Bible is still under the authority of the Bible.
- We are responsible to study the Word of God and make sure that what we believe agrees with what God has said.

[APPROACHING THIS PASSAGE]

- This is especially important when studying Bible prophecy.
- People often speak very confidently about prophetic events.
- They create charts and timelines, identify people and events, and sometimes present their conclusions as though every detail were plainly stated in Scripture.
- The problem is not studying prophecy.
- God placed these passages in the Bible because He wants us to study and understand them.
- The danger comes when someone's interpretation begins to carry the same authority as the words God actually inspired.
- In this passage, Paul speaks about the coming of Jesus Christ, our gathering together unto Him, a falling away, the man of sin, the temple of God, a restraining power, Satanic signs, strong delusion, and the final destruction of the Wicked one.
- Paul plainly reveals certain truths about these events.
- But he does not identify or explain every detail.
- As we study the passage, we need to distinguish between what the Bible directly says and what we believe it may be describing.

[PURPOSE OF THE SERMON]

- The purpose of this sermon is not to answer every question concerning Bible prophecy.
- It is not to identify every person or event with absolute certainty.
- The purpose is to carefully examine what Paul says and understand his warning against deception.
- Paul wanted these believers to stop being shaken by false teaching and return to the truth they had already received.
- That same warning applies to us.
- We must know the Word of God, examine what we hear, and be willing to let Scripture correct what we believe.

[SERMON DIRECTION]

As we work through this passage, we are going to examine three truths about deception:

- BELIEVERS CAN BE SHAKEN BY FALSE TEACHING (VV. 1–2)
- GOD’S WORD MUST SETTLE WHAT WE BELIEVE (VV. 3–8)
- REJECTING TRUTH OPENS THE DOOR TO DELUSION (VV. 9–12)

1. BELIEVERS CAN BE SHAKEN BY FALSE TEACHING (VV. 1–2)

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by our* gathering together unto him, **2** That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

- Paul begins by calling them “brethren.” He is writing to saved people.
- His subject is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “our gathering together unto him.”
- These were the truths Paul had previously given them for comfort.
- But a false message concerning these events had disturbed the church.

[SHAKEN IN MIND]

- Paul tells them not to be “soon shaken in mind, or be troubled.”
- To be shaken is to be moved away from a settled position.
- False teaching had disturbed their thinking and unsettled what Paul had taught them.
- That’s what false doctrine does. It will have a real effect upon saved people.
- It can create fear where there should be comfort, confusion where there should be confidence, and instability.

[EXAMPLE]

- This can happen when a believer hears a new teaching and immediately begins questioning everything they previously believed.
- Instead of calmly opening the Bible and examining the claim, you become troubled by the confidence of the person presenting it.

[APPLICATION]

- We should not allow every unfamiliar teaching to shake our minds.
- When we hear something new, our first response should be to slow down, open the Bible, and examine what God has said.

[KEY LINE]

- False teaching cannot take away our salvation, but it can take away the peace and confidence that comes from understanding the truth.

- Paul identifies three ways this false message may have reached the church: “by spirit,” “by word,” or “by letter as from us.”

[BY SPIRIT]

- Someone may have claimed to possess a spiritual revelation or prophetic message.
- That does not mean the Holy Spirit revealed something false. It means the message was presented as though it came from a spiritual source.

[NEXT SLIDE]

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

- John warns believers that not every spirit is of God and not every spiritual claim should be believed.
- Our responsibility is to “try the spirits” by comparing what is taught with the Word of God.

No spiritual claim carries more authority than the written Word of God.

[BE NOT TROUBLED BY WORD]

- The message may also have come through spoken teaching or a report passed from one person to another.
- Someone may have spoken confidently and claimed to know what was happening.

[EXAMPLE]

There is a problem when people will elevate the words of a pastor over the authority of God’s Word. Someone can say, “Pastor told us that we can’t talk to that person, We can’t knock on those doors because pastor said so.” Don’t let another man’s words trouble you.

[APPLICATION]

Confidence is not the same thing as truth.

Spoken teaching must always be tested by Scripture just like every other claim.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

[BE NOT TROUBLED BY LETTER AS FROM US]

- The message may have been contained in a letter that claimed to come from Paul and his companions.
- Paul’s name would have given the message credibility.

The Thessalonians may have believed it because they thought it carried apostolic authority.

But Paul is letting them know not to believe a message merely because it appeared spiritual, sounded confident, or carried his name. And what was that message that was troubling their mind?

[THE FALSE CLAIM]

- The message troubling them was “that the day of Christ is at hand.”
- Paul was correcting a false conclusion concerning the coming of Christ.
- He wanted to prevent them from being shaken by something that was not true.
- Paul is going to remind them that the day of Christ would not come before certain events occurred.
- We will examine those events beginning in the next verse.

2. GOD’S WORD MUST SETTLE WHAT WE BELIEVE (VV. 3–8)

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; **4** Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

- Paul gives them a direct command: “Let no man deceive you by any means.”
- It doesn’t matter who brings the message or how convincing it sounds.
- No person should ever be able to move us away from what God has said.
- Paul answers the false message by giving them revealed facts that should settle their minds.

[THAT DAY SHALL NOT COME]

- Paul introduced the subject in verse 1 as the coming of Jesus Christ and our gathering together unto Him.
- Therefore, when he says “that day” in verse 3, he is pointing back to the event already under discussion.

He says that day will not come until a falling away occurs and the man of sin is revealed.

If Scripture says something must happen first before the coming of Jesus Christ. Then you better believe that these things will happen before Jesus comes back and before we are gathered unto Him.

- Now notice the first event Paul names in verse 3.
- He says, “Except there come a falling away first.”

[THE FALLING AWAY]

- A falling away is a departure from a position that someone previously held or claimed to hold.
- In this context, it describes a departure from biblical truth.

This does not mean saved people will lose their salvation.

It can include people abandoning sound doctrine, churches moving away from truth, people openly rejecting the faith they once claimed.

[NEXT SLIDE]

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

Paul describes people departing from the faith by accepting seducing spirits and false doctrines.

- That fits the context of 2 Thessalonians 2, which concerns spiritual deception, rejection of truth, and believing a lie.
- Paul does not tell us exactly how widespread or how long this falling away will be.
- But he clearly tells us that a departure from truth must occur before that day.

[APPLICATION]

We can see this kind of departure in our own time. Look at all the churches that have moved away from the true gospel. Look at all the people that have added works as a requirement for salvation. Look at all the people that want nothing to do with the God of the Bible.

We don’t know the timing or when this will finally be fulfilled, but we do know that a falling away will take place and then the man of sin will be revealed.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

- Paul is describing a particular individual.
- Calling him “the man of sin” identifies his character. He will be openly characterized by rebellion against God.
- Calling him “the son of perdition” identifies his end. “Perdition” refers to utter destruction.

This man will be revealed before Jesus Christ returns and we are gathered unto Him.

There will come a point when His identity and wicked character are openly manifested.

We do not need to identify the man of sin before God reveals him.

Verse 3 tells us that this man will be revealed. Verse 4 explains what he will do.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

- Paul says that he “opposeth” God. He deliberately sets himself against God and God’s authority.
- He “exalteth himself,” meaning that he lifts himself above every object of worship.
- He does not merely deny the true God. He attempts to take the place of God.
- He seeks the worship, obedience, and authority that belong to God alone.
- Verse 4 then tells us where he takes this position: “He as God sitteth in the temple of God.”
- There are a couple of different ways that people interpret “the temple of God.”
- Some people think there will be a third temple built in Jerusalem.

• Some people think this is referring to a spiritual temple, or the Church. Because now in the New Testament we as believers are called the temple of God...

[REFERENCE] 1 Corinthians 3:16–17

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? **17** If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

• God does not have a physical temple on this earth. And if anyone built a physical temple today it wouldn’t be God’s temple.

• I would be lying if I told you I know exactly what temple this is referring to.

[EXAMPLE] If I stood up here and said, “The Jews are for sure going to rebuild a third temple in Jerusalem and restart animal sacrifices, and the antichrist is going to sit in that temple and declare himself to be God...”

That could be true, there are passages that cause people to come to that conclusion, but...

That’s where you want to be careful. When something is not 100% clear cut and perfectly explained in scripture, do not treat assumption and speculation as truth. That’s how false doctrine begins to grow and how deception starts to take root in a believer.

• We must be careful not to add details that God did not give us.

[NEXT SLIDE]

Proverbs 30:5-6 Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. **6** Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

What we know for sure is that this man of sin will be revealed and will attempt to take the place and authority that belongs only to God. He will try. But it’s laughable to think anyone could ever take the place of God the Creator.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:5-7 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? **6** And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. **7** For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

- Paul had already taught them these things while he was with them before.
- Their problem was not a lack of truth. They had been moved away from what they had received.
- New teaching should not cause us to abandon established truth unless Scripture demonstrates that we were wrong. Paul is confirming, reminding. What has already been established has not changed.
- Verse 6 then explains why the man of sin had not yet been revealed.
- Something was withholding him.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way.

[THE RESTRAINER]

- To “withhold” is to hold something back.
 - Verse 7 expresses the same idea with “he who now letteth.” In the KJV, “let” can mean to hinder or restrain.
 - The basic picture is simple: someone is preventing the man of sin from being revealed.
 - That restraint will remain until he is “taken out of the way.”
 - The Thessalonians apparently knew the restrainer’s identity because Paul had told them.
 - We do not have that earlier conversation, and this letter does not name the restrainer.
 - The Bible tells us what the restrainer does, but it does not specifically tell us who the restrainer is.
-
- It’s okay to say “I don’t know” when studying the Bible.
 - That is not a failure to believe Scripture. It is a refusal to add our words to Scripture.
 - We do know that the man of sin is restrained until the appointed time.

Now notice the beginning of verse 7: “The mystery of iniquity doth already work.”

[THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY]

- “Iniquity” is wickedness or rebellion against God.
- The word “mystery” describes something that is not yet fully seen or revealed.
- The final man of sin had not appeared, but the rebellion and deception that would characterize him were already operating.
- There is both a present working of iniquity and a future revelation of the Wicked one.

When he is finally revealed, Paul tells us exactly how he will end.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

- “That Wicked” is another description of the man of sin.
- Christ will consume him with the spirit of His mouth and destroy him with the brightness of His coming.

There will be no struggle between equal powers. Jesus Christ will destroy him.

- God’s Word gives us the order of events and describes the falling away and the man of sin.
- It tells us what the restrainer does without identifying who it is.
- It leaves some details uncertain, but it clearly reveals the outcome.

Paul is reestablishing these truths for the Thessalonians so they would not be shaken or troubled.

God's Word must always settle what we believe. Don't let anything or anyone else move you to a different position without scripture.

- Verse 8 tells us how the Wicked one will end.
- Beginning in verse 9, Paul explains how he will work and why so many people will be deceived by him.

3. REJECTING TRUTH OPENS THE DOOR TO DELUSION (VV. 9–12)

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

Verse 9 takes us back to before the wicked one is destroyed.

Before Jesus Christ destroys him at His coming, he will deceive many people.

Paul tells us where his power comes from and why people will believe his lies.

It says that his coming is after the working of Satan. That's where his power and influence comes from.

- Paul says his coming will be accompanied by "power and signs and lying wonders."
- People may see things that appear impressive, supernatural, and convincing.

[IMPORTANT]

- Something supernatural is not necessarily from God.
- A person may claim to have received a dream, vision, prophecy, or spiritual experience.
- But an experience does not become our final authority.
- Every spiritual claim must still be tested by the Word of God.

[NEXT SLIDE]

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, 2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; 3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams...*

- God warned Israel that even if a sign came to pass, they were not to follow someone who led them away from the truth.
- The sign did not prove that the message came from God.
- The message still had to agree with what God had already revealed.

[EXAMPLE]

Someone may say, "I know this teaching is true because I had a dream about it."

Someone else may say, "This person must be from God because look at all the miracles they are doing."

But no dream, experience, or sign has the authority to change what God has said.

[LOOK AT THOSE VERSES AGAIN] [NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 *Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

- Verse 10 tells us that this deception works “in them that perish.”
- These are not described in the same way as the believers in verses 1 and 2.
- The believers had been shaken and troubled by false teaching.
- But the people in verse 10 are perishing because they have rejected the truth that could have saved them.
- Paul says, “They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”
- Their problem was not simply that they had never heard the truth.
- The truth was available to them, but they refused to receive it.

[NEXT SLIDE]

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: **12** That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Because they refused to receive the love of the truth.

Because of that rejection, God sends them strong delusion.

- This does not describe God confusing people who sincerely desire to know the truth.
- It describes God judging people who have refused the truth He gave them.
- They chose the lie, and God gives them over to the deception they desired.

When it says that they should “believe a lie”, the immediate context includes the man of sin presenting himself as God and using satanic signs to deceive people.

The lie here likely includes people believing that this man of sin possesses the place and authority that belongs to God.

What we can say with certainty is that people who refused God’s truth (the gospel) will accept Satan’s deception.

[THEIR CONDEMNATION]

Verse 12 says that they will be “damned,” meaning condemned.

They are condemned because they believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

[APPLICATION]

Don’t reject truth in your life.

A person who only listens to teachers who agree with them will be deceived.

A person who refuses to reconsider what they believe when scripture corrects them will be deceived.

When you love the truth, you are allowing God’s Word to have the final say in your life.

[TRANSITION TO THE CONCLUSION]

- This passage began with believers who had been shaken by false teaching.
- Paul steadied them by reminding them of what God had revealed...
- He then warned them about the terrible end of those who reject the truth and believe a lie.
- The question for us is simple: How should we respond when we hear something spiritual or teaching from the Bible?
- We should receive the teaching with a willing heart, but we must also search the Scriptures to determine whether those things are true.

[NEXT SLIDE]

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

This is a description of the people from Berea

- The Bereans were willing to listen, but they did not accept something merely because a respected teacher said it.
- They searched the Scriptures for themselves to determine whether the things they heard were true.
- The more carefully we know the Bible, the less easily we will be moved away from what it teaches.

[FINAL APPLICATION]

- Listen when the Bible is taught, but search the Scriptures for yourself.
 - Do not treat another person's opinion as though it were the Word of God.
 - Do not preach speculation with the certainty.
 - Be willing to let the Bible correct what you believe.
 - Do not merely know the truth—receive it, love it, and hold firmly to it.
-
- The best protection against deception is a heart that loves the truth and a mind that is settled upon the Word of God alone.

Do not be impressed by confidence, authority, or spiritual claims.

- Search the Scriptures.
- Hold fast to what God has said. Don't be deceived by man.

Let's Pray