

**TEXT:** 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (focus in this sermon is on 2:3-12) (NASB)

Text with some reading notes to be used during the reading (make notes explicit this time for application of HomII concepts, which is probably good for me in the future so I remember what I was thinking!).

(1) Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, (2) that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

(3) Let no one in any way deceive you, **[here is Paul’s main point in this text: do not be deceived that you are in the midst of the day of the Lord, receiving the wrath of God. How can we be so sure? He explains some things that we would see in the midst of the Day, which we do not see. Thus, we are not in it.]** for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. **[Paul has explained two things: that a) there is an apostasy, a large movement of people away from God; and b) the man of sin, the Antichrist, will make his appearance.]**

(5) **[Read with some emphasis here]** Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? **[Now he returns to his line of argument, particularly speaking about the revelation of the Antichrist.] [In reading the following, emphasize the “now” and “then” phrases as underlined because they are important to the sequence of events.]**

(6) And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. (7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so until* he is taken out of the way. (8) Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; (9) *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders,

(10) 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. **[At this point, the focus has shifted to those involved in the apostasy. Notice that those who do not receive the love of the truth are those who will perish. Because they did not believe, they will receive God’s judgment.]** (11) For this reason, God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, (12) in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

**TITLE:** Do not be deceived!

**HOMILETICAL IDEA, aka PROPOSITION:** Do not be deceived about the future, for Christians will not experience the wrath of the Day of the Lord.

**INTRODUCTION:** (Summarize **2:1-2** and **2:5** here since we've already looked at them in some detail.) If we back up a little bit, we will remember that the Thessalonian church faced great tribulation. This is evident in **1:4-7** (read relevant bits of this). This apparently made them ripe targets for wrong teaching, which is alluded to in **2:1-2**. Somehow, they had been convinced (or nearly so!) that they were in the midst of the Day of the Lord, that God's judgment had begun. This entailed a few things:

1. They forgot previous teaching – In **2:5** Paul chides them, “Do you not remember...I was telling you these things?”
2. They heard from a false teacher, either from their own midst or from outside (**Acts 20:29-30**), by means of a prophecy or written letter (**1:2**).
3. They became disturbed, shaken up, even to the point of being deceived (**1:2-3**).

So Paul writes in chapter 2 to correct their thinking and help them get out of the rut of deception that they were in. **Yes**, they have tribulation. But **no**, this is not the end-time tribulation, which will be of a far worse variety. There will be things going on **then** which are not here **now**.

**Transition from introduction to body:** What we have said is that God did not want the Thessalonians to be deceived about future events. Neither does he want us to be deceived about future things, in particular the fact that the Christian is NOT present during the earthly tribulation, the particularly wrath-ful part of the DOL. But how can we be sure? How can the Bible say to not be deceived about the future, for Christians will not experience the wrath of the Day of the Lord. Paul gives us three good reasons right in the text.

The first reason is...

**I. The Man of Sin has not yet been revealed. Vv. 3c-4, 8-9**

A. You would know the Man of Sin by his opposition of God.

Rev 13:6, where it is said of this one, the beast, “And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name....”

B. You would know the Man of Sin by his claim to deity.

**Illustration:** This is just like Satan. Consider **Isaiah 14:14**, which I believe is a reference to Lucifer at his fall from a holy state when he became Satan, the great opposer of God.

The Abomination of Desolation is what is spoken of here. See **Matt 24:15**, **Dan 9:27**. **Dan 11:36** also speaks of the antichrist. But this sort of thing happened one time in the past:

**Illustration:** **Dan 11:21-35** records, by prophetic word, the career of Antiochus Epiphanes and his desecration of the Jewish temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. [Flesh this history out with some from 1 Maccabees, etc.]

C. You would know the Man of Sin by his Satanically powered deceitful signs and wonders.

These are reminiscent of the signs of an apostle (**2 Cor 12:12**). If only those who were deceived would hearken back to **Deut 13:1-3** and **18:21-22**. They would know how to evaluate a miracle-worker, even one whose miracles do come true!  
[Explain]

D. All will know the Man of Sin by his ultimate end – destruction.

He is described in v. 3 as the “son of perdition.” This is same description as Judas Iscariot in **John 17:12**. A “son of perdition” is a person whose destiny is perdition, aka destruction. It doesn’t mean that “Mr. Perdition” was his father, but it is an idiom for one who is destined for destruction. Similar phrases occur in **1 Thess 5:5**, where Christians are called sons of light and sons of the day, that is, we are to be characterized by light, as God our Father is light and in him there is no darkness at all! See also **Matt 13:38**.

Indeed he will be “consumed” and “destroyed” by the Lord Jesus Christ at Christ’s second coming. Refer to **Rev 19:15**, **Isa. 11:4**. The brightness of his coming refers to 2 Thess 1:7 “flaming fire” among other references to his second coming (**Matt 24:30**).

Note for a minute the deception of this Antichrist compared to the true Christ:

	<b>Christ</b>	<b>Antichrist</b>
An open “revelation” or disclosure	1:8	2:8
A “coming”	2:8	2:9
Claim worship as God	1:10	2:4
Powerful signs	1:7	2:9

For those who are deceived, it might be a “who is who here?” kind of question. The Antichrist is Satan’s great masterpiece of a deception. He is not only against Christ, but a pseudo-Christ.

**Transition between main points:** Paul has said that unless the Man of Sin is revealed, the Day of the Lord is not yet. The DOL is not here yet, he says. What he is saying is this: “I’ll believe it when I see it!” We cannot always say this because in a real way we “walk by faith and not by sight.” But Paul is giving us clear evidence: “If you believed my teaching, then you can say with certainty that we are not in the DOL because you don’t see it’s constituent events yet!”

Well, we’ve only gone over one reason not to be deceived about the future: the man of sin has not yet been revealed. There are still two more. The next one is...

## **II. The Apostasy has not yet happened. Vv. 3b, 10-12**

Unfortunately, the deceptive works of the Antichrist will be involved in a great apostasy from God. This will perhaps begin to happen immediately after the rapture, but will certainly be “aided and abetted” by the presence of the Antichrist, who will quickly appear on the scene after the rapture.

As for the meaning of the word “apostasia” where “falling away” comes from, Acts 21:21 gives us a good clue. This is by far the normal meaning of the word – a revolt or defection in a religious sense.

- A. The people of this apostasy are those who rejected the truth of the gospel and took pleasure in wickedness.  
Refer to **2 Thess 1:8, Rom 1:32** for parallels on these characteristics.
- B. As punishment, God will send them a strong deluding influence.

**Illustration:** “George Eliot, in one of her novels, says that great delusions are sometimes mistaken for great faith.” [Hallock, p. 215]. This could be the case if delusion is couched in terms of a world-wide religious system, as indicated in Rev 13 and the references to “worship” of the beast and dragon. This will have some kind of religious aspect to it. In other words, people will be going like sheep to the slaughter—not knowing what is happening, and actually believing that they are doing the good and right thing! This happens all the time today with cults, the –isms, -ics, and -tics.

**Biblical Illustration:** It may seem to you unfair that God sends these folks a deluding influence. After all, doesn’t that mean that they don’t have a chance? How can God set them in their course by allowing a delusion yet also at the same time can judge them for it? This seems like an unanswerable question. But there are a few things that help us. Read **Romans 9:10-24**, which shows us that

- 1) The answer to this paradox is God’s sovereign choice, his purpose, justly carried out, and mercifully applied.
- 2) The example of Pharaoh is instructive—he hardened his heart against God (**Exodus 8:15**) but it can also be said that God hardened his heart (**Exodus 7:3**).
- 3) Verses 19-21 show us that we should not talk back to God when he tells us this kind of truth.
- 4) Finally, note that these of the apostasy did openly reject the gospel. They did not believe it; rather they “took pleasure in wickedness.” They have no excuses.

- C. As a result of the great delusion, they will believe “the lie.”

At this stage, the lie can be about anything as far from the truth as the Antichrist wants it to be. Unbelievers will swallow it hook, line, and sinker.

**Illustrate:** Gen 3:4 shows a lie, which at the time of its speaking was “the lie” in the sense that it was the first one. The lie denied God’s word; we would be warranted to believe that “the lie” of the future antichrist will also be something that denies the truth of the Scripture, in however subtle a fashion it might be. The lie will probably relate to the worship of the Antichrist and his so-called divine powers.

- D. The final result will be that the apostates will be condemned to death for their unbelief. They will perish in the judgment and be cast into Hell. They will not be saved (vv. 2:12, 2:10, 2:10).

**Application:** Catch the gravity of this truth! **1 Thess 2:10-12** give us a terrible sequence of events for those who rebel from God: they receive not the love of the truth, so God will judge them by causing them to be deceived (regarding the Antichrist and the final great apostasy). This deception will mean that there will be thousands, millions, perhaps billions of people who will believe the lie of the Antichrist's deity and rebel against God. There will be no turning back for those apostates at this point. [Of course, some will be saved during the tribulation...Rev 7:3-4, 13:7-8, 14:17, 20:4, etc.] After the rapture happens, from a human standpoint, the "chances" go way down for a person to become a believer. The time for salvation is now, friends. [Proclaim the gospel here!]

**Transition between main points:** And if the two reasons that he has mentioned are not enough, God delimits for us one more certainty that will come to pass immediately before the two events we've already discussed—the revelation of the man of sin and the great apostasy—and that is that...

### III. The Restrainer has not yet been moved out of the way. Vv. 6-7

#### A. At present, the Restrainer is holding back the Antichrist

Who is this restrainer? It is a much debated text, but I'm convinced that it is an oblique reference to the Holy Spirit and particularly His presence in the church during this age of grace. This is evident because:

1. Only the divine power of the Spirit of God can truly restrain the full operation of evil. We cannot. We are not really allowed to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." (**Matt 16:23**) No, instead it is, "The Lord rebuke you" (**Jude 9**).
2. The grammar in the text indicates the Holy Spirit (neuter "what" now restrains and masculine "he" who restrains) because other texts in the Bible that clearly refer to the Holy Spirit exhibit this same characteristic (John 15:26, 16:13-14). The Spirit's role in restraint of sin is in Gen 6:3.
3. The rapture will remove the Holy Spirit, the restrainer, and the Antichrist will be free to do what he wishes.

#### B. At present, evil work is going on all the time, even though there is a restrainer.

This would perhaps explain some of the Thessalonians' problems in the present life—elements of the devil's agents are running around now doing as much damage as possible to the cause of Christ. Persecution against believers is one outworking of this work of the spiritual forces of darkness.

#### C. In the future, the Antichrist will be revealed at the appropriate time, when the restrainer is removed. God has the right time in mind for this to occur.

And now we can have a fuller picture of what happens at the end of the present age and at the start of the tribulation period. Here is the list of items in roughly chronological order:

1. The present working of the mystery of iniquity. Many antichrist-like spirits are around today, denying Christ and the doctrine of the Bible.
2. The present work of the restrainer in restraining that work of iniquity so that things are not as bad as they could be.
3. The restrainer will be taken out of the way in the rapture.
4. There will be a culmination of the apostasy of 1 Tim 4, 2 Tim 3 in what is called **the** apostasy. There will be a massive revolt from the true God in some sort of world-wide (ecumenical) movement.
5. The covenant brokered by the Antichrist and the Jews will be ratified according to Daniel 9:27.
6. The result will be that many will proclaim “peace and safety.” All may be disposed to think that the *Pax Romana* is back, which was a great period of world peace. This is recorded for us in 1 Thess 5:3.
7. There will be a sudden unleashing of God’s wrath, as mentioned in 1 Thess 5:3, and throughout Revelation 6-19. The peace was just the lid on a pot about to boil over.
8. The covenant with the Antichrist will be broken at the mid-point of the tribulation.
9. There will be the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet – see Matt 24:15, Dan 9:27.
10. At the end of the tribulation, the man of sin will be destroyed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Is 11:4, Rev 19:15, 2 Thess 2:8)

**Transition from body to conclusion:**

**CONCLUSION:** So God desires for us not to be deceived about the future. Christians will not experience the wrath of the Day of the Lord. The teaching that Christians will pass through the tribulation time is not Biblical. It is called the post-tribulation rapture position. Paul is arguing against that very position in this text! The truth that those in Christ will be kept from this time of judgment is repeatedly mentioned in other Scriptures as well—this is the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture:

We can see it very clearly in **Rev 3:10** – “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

Or yet again in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians in **1 Thess 1:10**, speaking of Jesus, “who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

Or in **5:9** of the same book, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A number of things have to happen before this wrath comes upon the world. The text tells us that the restrainer has to be moved out of the way. That is the Holy Spirit and His presence through the church, which will be moved out at the rapture of the church. This will happen imminently, at any moment. But then also the great and final apostasy must take place, which is associated with the revelation and evil work of the Antichrist. Millions will be deceived and ultimately doomed.

So what shall we do now that we have heard all of these things? Of what use is this to us? Can we just say “Thanks Lord” and go home because we don’t have to worry about all this? “I’m a Christian and I’ll be raptured and none of this concerns me. Yippee!”

In other words, **did I preach this sermon just to tell you, “Don’t worry about it”!?!?!?** I certainly didn’t mean to! Consider what the text has for us:

**Application:** Do not take a part in the seeds of apostasy that are floating around today. Remember, “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” **1 John 2:18-19** says “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us...” **1 John 4:3:** “and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist.” Even Christians can unwittingly buy into world-peace, world-church movements that sound nice and loving and all. But such movements are precursors to the final great apostasy!

**Application:** Those of us who are Christians here can take great comfort in the fact that we will not experience the day of God’s wrath. This is, after all, what Paul does in **1 Thess 4:18** “comfort one another with these words.” **5:11:** “Encourage one another and build up one another, just as you are also doing.” Even in our text, in the verse after where we stopped, **1 Thess 2:13**, Paul expresses thankfulness for the fact that the saints at Thessalonica will not suffer God’s wrath, but instead have been elected to salvation. We’ll look at that next time.

**Application:** Do not be deceived by false teaching. You know, deception is the goal of false teaching. The false teacher may trouble you, or get you all worked up and disturbed, but God always points us back to the previously given Word of God as final and authoritative. Paul even said, “Do you not remember...I was telling you these things?” They had forgotten altogether or missed the forest for the trees. The particular issue at hand is the tribulation and Day of the Lord. But the principle applies in anything. Someone comes along with a new teaching on any subject, and you are **NOT TO BE DECEIVED!**

Remember: “great delusions are sometimes mistaken for great faith.” Oh do not fall into a trap dear friends! Instead let us have “great faith in great truths.”

<pause><prayer>

### **Informal Bibliography**

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