

# Secure—Though Apostasy Is All Around

2 Thessalonians 2:9-17

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## **Review and Introduction:**

Last week, we learned about the great falling away that Paul prophesied.

- He told the Thessalonians that before Jesus comes, this great apostasy would come, and that it would be led by the man of sin.
  - This man would set himself up as God in the very house of God—in the church—and would claim authority over all things.
  - Although Paul is eager to assure us that this son of perdition will be utterly destroyed by the Lord Jesus,
    - he makes it clear that this lawless one will lead the whole church into apostasy... a great falling away into deception—though not every person.
- He explained to the Thessalonians that even in their day, the mystery of iniquity was already at work...
  - but that the man of sin would not be revealed until the thing that was restraining him was taken out of the way.
  - Most of the fathers in the early church understood this to be a reference to the Roman Empire.
    - As long as the empire was strong, the man of sin could not rise up in the church to claim dominion over all things as if he were the Christ.
- Almost all of the pre-reformers and the reformers as well as the puritans and others who came after them understood the man of sin to be papacy.
  - The popes of the Roman church fit the description better than anyone else.
    - The pope has even claimed to be the one who sits in the place of Christ, and so to have authority over all churches and all church officers and all kings and rulers and people.
      - He has given himself titles such as *Dominus Deus noster papa*—Our Lord God the pope.
    - The popes have even claimed authority to curse people and to forgive sins, even by such methods as purchasing indulgences,
      - Or obtaining favour with God by praying to Mary and the saints.
    - Lying signs and wonders have been employed to support many of the false claims of the papacy.
  - The only thing that is possibly lacking is that the pope was only over the western branch of the church, and the prophecy may require another man of sin that will take authority over all of Christendom.
    - It is difficult to say for sure what a prophecy requires.
    - But even if the papacy had not already fulfilled Paul's prophecy, he is certainly a precursor to the one who is yet to come.
      - It is not something that we have to know to understand what we need to understand about this prophecy—the church has often been surprised when they see just how prophecy is fulfilled.

But whatever the case, a universal apostasy of the church is very unsettling.

- We are in a position from which we can see apostasy all around us, in the past as well as the present.
  - We can look back and see how the whole church in the west fell into apostasy under the pope and the church in the east under their own deceptions
  - And today, we can see how nearly all of the major protestant denominations that rose up against the apostasy have fallen into apostasy themselves...
    - And to our dismay, we see even the remnant churches that have arisen from them falling away.
- When you see so many around you falling away, the great question for you can be,
  - How do I know that I will not be deceived?
    - I remember my older daughters asking me this when they saw many of their friends who had grown up in solid biblical churches falling away.
    - “How can I know I will not be next?”
- That is what we are looking at this week in 2 Thessalonians 2:9-17.
  - Please give me your attention as I read this passage to you.

**2 Thess 2:9-17: The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup> And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup> that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. <sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.**

May God bless the reading and the preaching of the word to us in His mercy.

- May He enable us to receive the encouragement that is given us here to assure us that though many others in the visible church may fall away, if we are truly in Christ, we will not fall away.
- So how do you know that you will not fall away when so many others do?

**I. If you love the truth, you will not fall away because you will not be attracted to apostasy.**

- I showed you this last week.

A. Those who fall, according verses 9-12, are those who do not love the truth.

- Verses 9-10 say: **The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.**

1. They received the gospel outwardly—they went along with it and made a profession of faith with their lips,
  - but they were never really comfortable with it.
  - It just did not sit right with them.
  - They found parts of the message embarrassing and parts of it even offensive and unfair—
    - At the heart of things, it is simply that they don't love the truth—they went along with it, but they never loved it.
  
2. And as I told you last week, if that is where you are at, you are just waiting to be led away by some false teaching.
  - As soon as a false wind of doctrine blows across your path, you will be drawn to it like a fly to a decaying carcass.
    - In your mind, something more attractive than the truth has come along.
    - Very often, the acceptance grows up a little bit at a time.
  - a. At first, there are just a couple of things that you take the edge off—maybe you want more freedom to do what you want,
    - so you find a church attractive that does not regard the Sabbath, call women to submit to their husbands, and expect members to be regular in family worship...
    - Your new church continues in this trajectory, and in the next generation they also are accepting of common law marriage, abortion, and female pastors...
    - And then in the next generation, pretty much anything goes as long as it is not socially unacceptable.
  - b. Or maybe your discomfort with the truth was with the gospel itself...
    - You don't like the idea of God being holy and punishing people in hell, so you find a church that doesn't talk about hell—it just talks about trusting Jesus to go to heaven...
      - And then in a generation or so, it starts to deny hell and to look at Jesus as a wonderful example that we should follow rather than as the Lamb of God who takes away our sin.
      - And in the generation after that, this church is looking to be inclusive of all other religions and their leaders alongside of Jesus.
  - c. Or maybe you are embarrassed about things like creation...you find it makes you less acceptable in society.
    - So you are attracted to a church that says that it is a non-issue whether God created the world in six days or not...
    - And in the next generation, they talk with disdain of those who believe that the Bible is the Word of God.
      - They have moved from walking in the counsel of the ungodly to sitting in the seat of the scornful.
  
3. Our text explains how it is that people can turn so far away and believe things that are obviously lies.
  - It says that God actually sends them strong delusion that they might believe a lie.
    - It is a just punishment for them for not believing the truth and for having pleasure in unrighteousness...

- Do you see that in verse 11 and 12?
  - **2 Thess 2:11-12: And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, <sup>12</sup> that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**
- The LORD really just gives them what they want.
  - They do not want the truth, so He turns them over to lies.
  - It is their own preference, and the LORD just helps them along on their way so that they believe absurdities...
    - That homosexually it and abortion are good...
    - That all religions are the same...
    - That there is no such thing as judgment or hell.
    - That the world created itself.
  - Human beings could not believe such things if God had not turned them over to deception.
    - That is the explanation for it.

TRANS> If you do not love the truth, it is just a matter of time until you will be deceived.

B. But if you love the truth, you will not be deceived at last!

1. I do not say that you will not be deceived at all along the way...
  - It takes time to grow into a deeper and deeper love of the truth.
    - And it takes time to come to understand the truth.
  - But I mean that false gospels and lies of the world will have no attraction to you.
    - They will be repulsive because the truth is precious to you.
2. There is so much to love about the truth of the gospel!
  - a. You are in awe at the love of God that caused Him to send Jesus to die for such wretched sinners as us.
    - So when someone comes along and wants to downplay sin and the fact that we deserve to go to hell and that only Jesus can save us...
    - That is not at all attractive to you—because you are rejoicing in God’s mercy to sinners that is completely undeserved!
  - b. Likewise, you are delighted with Jesus and His purity—that He is a man without sin—holy, harmless, and undefiled—
    - one who truly loves the Father and always pleases Him.
      - You are aspiring to grow in holiness, to become more and more like Him.
    - So when someone comes along and wants to cut out some of God’s moral requirements—you have no use for it.
      - You love the Lord and have no pleasure in unrighteousness.
  - c. And when the world comes along to tell you that you should learn to love yourself, and that you should put yourself first...
    - You will be appalled with that—you love the truth that teaches you to have the mind of Christ who considered others to be more important than Himself—that is what you are striving for in your life.
      - You have no use for this foolish teaching about self-esteem that sounds more like Maslow than Jesus.

3. And this love for the truth that you have is something that will grow.
  - With your brothers and sisters in the church, you will want to, as it says in Eph 4:13-15: **come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—**
  - False gospels and lies from the world will look more and more like decaying carcasses and the truth of the gospel will be more and more dear...
    - Just to think that the eternal God who created us, against whom we rebelled, has reached out to us to redeem us by the blood of His Son and to transform us by His Spirit so that we can live with Him in glory forever!

TRANS> So do you see how loving the truth keeps you from deception?

- You have no use for the things that draw you away from Him!

C. Is there someone here who does not have this love for the truth?

1. I will tell you what you must do...
  - You must come humbly to the LORD and ask Him to give you a love for the truth—plead with Him to have mercy on you...
    - Get to Jesus Christ who is the truth—He will not turn you away.
    - Get to His word, get to prayer, sing praises to Him...beg Him to give you a love for the truth.
2. I urge you to open yourself up to truth... receive it... don't resist it.
  - Surely you can see that you are a sinner who needs a Saviour, can't you?
    - Surely you can see that things are not right with you and God—can't you?
  - Well then isn't it indeed that best news in the world that God has sent His Son from heaven to save you?
    - That He has come to do all that must be done to establish a right relationship between you and God?
    - That His zeal to do this is so great that He even went to the cross to bear your punishment there?
      - Isn't that a Saviour to love and good news to be loved?
  - Then just entrust yourself entirely to Him to save you!
    - Just fall upon Him as helpless and ask Him to catch you.
    - Believe in Him, rest upon Him, and you will be saved by Him.
      - He never turned a sinner away and He won't turn you away either.

TRANS> And you who do love the truth now—I have a question for you...

- You love the truth now, but when you see others next to you who seemed to love the truth, but then fell away...
  - How do you know that that will not happen to you too?
  - That is the next thing I want to show from our text... How do you know that you are secure in your love of the truth?

## II. If you love the truth now, it shows that God has chosen you for salvation.

- That is what Paul shows us in verses 13 & 14.

### A. You love the truth because God chose you for salvation!

1. You would not love the truth if He had not chosen you to love it.
  - Do you see what it says...
    - **v. 13: He chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.**
  - a. The word *chose* means that He singled you out for salvation...
    - He gave it to you instead of to someone else.
    - To be chosen is to be given something that is not given to someone else.
  - b. Do you want to know why He chose you?
    - 1) Well I will tell you, it was definitely not because of anything you did.
      - It says that He chose you in love *from the beginning*.
      - From the beginning of what?
        - Well, from the beginning of God's plan to make the world.
        - Ephesians 1:4 makes this very clear when it says that He chose us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame...
      - So you can see why I say that it was definitely not because of anything that you did—it was before you were around to do anything.
    - 2) All we are told is that you are beloved of the Lord.
      - He set His special love on you to be someone who would be saved though sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth.
      - He did it because He loved you, not because of anything you did.
2. But what does it mean when it says that you were chosen for salvation **through sanctification by the Spirit and belief of the truth**?
  - a. **Sanctification of the Spirit** here refers to *definitive sanctification*—which is also called the new birth—
    - You know, being born of the Holy Spirit...
      - He opened your eyes to see how much you need Jesus to save you.
      - He changed you so that you would want to be saved and to come to Christ—He is the one that made salvation in Jesus attractive to you.
    - If left to yourself, you would see no value in the truth...
      - You would not receive the truth.
  - b. He is the one who chose you to actually *believe the truth*.
    - He chose you for that too...
      - That you would say, “This is right—this is true—this is the way it really is.”
    - As I sometimes tell people, believing the truth is like getting a joke—once you get the joke, it is impossible to not get it anymore.
      - The light has come and the darkness is gone for you.
      - Once you see, you see.

- So you see, in choosing you for salvation, God actually chose you to be someone who would be sanctified by the Spirit to believe...
    - Saving faith was His gift, wrought by His Spirit, so that you would be saved by trusting in Jesus.
- B. And of course it is the gospel (or good news) about Jesus that He causes you to believe.
1. He called you to believe in Jesus for salvation, as it says in verse 14.
    - It is the salvation... v. 14: **to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
      - Paul calls it “our gospel” because it is the gospel that the apostles preached—the gospel that was given to them to preach to us.
    - So again, it is God that brought the gospel to you by His call—because He had chosen you for salvation from the beginning.
      - He established your heart to believe Christ—to love the truth.
      - And if your faith, and your love for the truth, is His gift, it cannot fail.
  2. It is a call for you to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - God showed you that He came in human flesh to establish a kingdom that is destined to be the kingdom of glory—it is a kingdom where Jesus Himself is king.
      - It is a kingdom of perfect righteousness from which we are completely cut off from because of our sin,
      - And God called you into this kingdom so that you could not resist.
  3. Do you see? Your love for the truth is God’s free gift to you.
    - a. He chose you to love the truth because He chose you for salvation in Jesus.
    - b. That is why Paul, seeing that the Thessalonians love the truth, says, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you brethren.”
      - They are among the people that God choose to believe—to love the truth.
        - And because this was God’s doing, God is to be thanked.
      - They would not love the truth if God had not chosen them.
        - You would not love the truth if God had not chosen you to do so.
- C. Do you see how this makes you secure, even though people around you fall away?
1. If God chose you to be someone who loves the truth so that you might be saved by believing the truth,
    - Then your love of the truth is not from you but from Him.
    - It is not something you produced in yourself, but a gift that He gave to you so that you could be saved.
    - It is not something that comes and goes with the shifting of your own emotions and desires, but something permanent that God has established in you.
  2. That means that those who follow deception and fall away from the truth never really loved the truth in the first place.
    - They made a profession, but they never really believed.
    - If they had received a God-given love for the truth, they would never have fallen.

3. No one can know if they are chosen to believe before they believe.
  - But once you believe, you can know that your love for the truth came from God.
  - Thank Him for it and be secure, knowing that if God chose you to be sanctified by the Spirit to believe the truth, you cannot be lead into apostasy.

TRANS> And that brings us to the third thing that Paul teaches us here...

### **III. If you love the truth, it is yours to stand securely (to feel secure) even when others fall away!**

- A. In verse 15, Paul essentially says, “hold on confidently to the truth you love.”
  - His words are, **Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.**
  1. Consider what this verse is telling us
    - a. Note the word *therefore*...
      - *Therefore*, because God chose you to believe the truth, *stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught.*
      - God chose you to believe these things, so believe them wholeheartedly—with confidence!
        - *stand fast and hold the traditions.*
    - b. The word *traditions* refers to something that was passed along from one to another.
      - And for the apostles of Jesus Christ, the traditions they taught were passed on to them from the Lord Jesus Himself.
      - Paul uses the verbal form of this word in 1 Cor 11:23 when he says, regarding the Lord’s Supper,
        - **“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;”**
        - It was a tradition he got from Jesus and passed on to us.
      - The apostles were called apostles of Christ because they were sent by Him to deliver to us what He gave to them.
      - Nothing that they taught was from themselves—it all originated with Jesus Christ the Lord.
    - c. That means that when they established churches with elders in every place, they did this because it was a tradition given to them by Jesus.
      - When they baptised believers and their children, they got that from Jesus.
      - When they instituted that the church should gather to break bread on the Lord’s Day and should hear the word read and expounded,
        - And then they instituted church discipline,
        - And even when they taught the doctrines of our faith, even the gospel itself, these were all things that they had received from Jesus to give to us.

2. Now if this is so, and of course it is so, and if God has chosen you to believe the truth,
    - a. then it is for you to stand fast in and hold the traditions you have been taught.
      - Not the ones you may have been taught by man, but the ones that come from the apostles that are now found in the Holy Scriptures.
      - It is for those who have received the love the truth to love these apostolic traditions...and to make much use of them.
    - b. You should come to them with zeal and eagerness, looking to God to bless you as you do.
      - You should use them all faithfully and regularly.
      - God uses these traditions to keep you in the love of the truth.
        - Your sense of confidence in the truth and your love for the truth grows as you continue in them.
        - So don't let anyone take them away!
  3. Those who do not love the truth do not love them.
    - a. The antichrist does not love them—
      - The pope replaces them with his own traditions—
        - things like praying to saints or buying indulgences or genuflecting before an altar or having special days besides the ones appointed by Christ.
      - And some of them he eliminates—such as the preaching of the Word which has a central place in Christ's traditions...
        - And some of them he clutters up with additional ceremonies that pervert them.
    - b. Other churches do similar things...
      - They will add musical performances to public worship, or they will add ceremonies like interpretive dancing or dialogue instead of preaching with authority, or multimedia—or they will leave off scripture reading...
    - c. If you love the truth, you are to have no use for manmade additions and detractions.
      - As we saw before, it is by altering things that apostasy progresses and that churches move further and further away from the truth.
        - It is our desire at Covenant Reformed, as much as we are able, to stand fast and hold the traditions of the apostles.
      - Christ and His salvation and His ways are set forth to us in the traditions that the apostles have passed on to us from Him.
        - It is for you to stand fast in them and hold them, and as you do so, you will not be led into deception if you are one who loves the truth.
- B. And all the while look to the LORD Himself to keep you in the love of the truth.
1. In verses 16 and 17, Paul writes a benediction to be read to the people.
    - With benedictions, God associates Himself with us as the people He blesses.
    - We receive the benediction when it is pronounced by a minister of the Word upon us.

2. In this benediction, Paul speaks of wonderful encouraging things about our security in Christ.
  - a. First, that God the Son and God the Father have loved us.
    - **Verse 16: Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us...**
    - To be beloved of God is everything—nothing can go wrong if you are loved by Him!
      - Nothing can make you as secure as this!
      - What could go wrong for you if the God of heaven has chosen you to obtain glory with Christ by believing the truth?
  - b. And in this benediction, Paul also declares that God has given us a sense of certainty about our future...He has **given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace...**
    - In other words, you have a future and a hope!
      - Even though you may see many falling into apostasy, God has given you assurance that you will not fall away.
    - This is not just consolation, but *everlasting* consolation or comfort that nobody can take away from you.
      - We may falter in times of discouragement, but our consolation will never be completely destroyed so as to bring us into despair.
        - It will always be before us that God's promises are good and that He will keep us until we are with Christ in glory.
      - This is our **good hope**, as it is called here—
        - A hope that is good both because it is the hope of that which is very good—an eternal inheritance with Christ...
        - And good because it is absolutely certain for us in Christ.
  - c. And the third thing Paul does in this benediction is to ask the Lord to take this consolation and good hope that He has given us and bring it into our experience...
    - He asks the LORD to give us the encouragement we need to live a godly life right now—to live in the truth that we love...
      - that He would **comfort our hearts and establish us in every good word and work.**
    - That we would live in the joy and security of our future glory, and that we would live a holy life of obedience.
      - That is what we want as those who love the truth.
      - We do not want to be deceived and led away, but we want to be kept by the power of God that we may live for Him in hope and obedience.
        - Paul looks to the LORD to do this for the Thessalonians, and this benediction is recorded for us that we might look to Him today to do the same in us.

**Conclusion:**

See that you are indeed among those who have received the love of the truth.

- If God has opened your heart to believe the truth, it will be impossible for you not to love it...
- just think, we sinners are forgiven by Christ crucified and are destined to be gathered to Him in glory forever when He returns.
  - This is our secure hope even when there are many all around us rejecting Him.
- God has put us on this trajectory and nobody can change that.