

CHAPTER 2

The apostle is very careful to hinder the spreading of an error into which some among them had fallen concerning the coming of Christ, as being very near (v. 1-3). Then he proceeds to confute the error he cautioned them against, by telling them of two great events that were antecedent to the coming of Christ — a general apostasy, and the revelation of antichrist, concerning whom the apostle tells them many remarkable things, about his name, his character, his rise, his fall, his reign, and the sin and ruin of his subjects (v. 4-12). He then comforts them against the terror of this apostasy, and exhorts them to steadfastness (v. 13-15). And concludes with a prayer for them (v. 16, 17).

~~2~~ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-3

CAUTIONS AGAINST FALSE ALARM

From these words it appears that some among the Thessalonians had mistaken the apostle's meaning, in what he had written in his former epistle about the coming of Christ, by thinking that it was near at hand, — that Christ was just ready to appear and come to judgment. Or, it may be, some among them pretended that they had the knowledge of this by particular revelation from the Spirit, or from some words they had heard from the apostle, when he was with them, or some letter he had written or they pretended he had written to them or some other person: and hereupon the apostle is careful to rectify this mistake, and to prevent the spreading of this error. Observe, If errors and mistakes arise among Christians, we should take the first opportunity to rectify them, and hinder the spreading thereof; and good men will be especially careful to suppress errors that may arise from a mistake of their words and actions, though that which was spoken or done was ever so innocent or well. We have a subtle adversary, who watches all opportunities to do mischief, and will sometimes promote errors even by means of the words of scripture. Observe,

I. How very earnest and solicitous this apostle was to prevent mistakes: *We beseech you, brethren*, etc., v. 1. He entreats them as brethren who might have charged them as a father charges his children: he shows great kindness and condescension, and insinuates himself into their affections. And this is the best way to deal with men when we would preserve or recover them from errors, to deal gently and affectionately with them: rough and rigorous treatment will but exasperate their spirits, and prejudice them against the reasons we may offer. He obtests and even conjures them in the most solemn manner: *By the coming of Christ*, etc. The words are in the form of an oath; and his meaning is that if they believed Christ would come, and if they desired he would come, and rejoiced in the hope of his coming, they should be careful to avoid the error, and the evil consequences of it, against which he was now cautioning them. From this form of obtestation used by the apostle, we may observe,

1. It is most certain that the Lord Jesus Christ will come to judge the world, that he will come in all the pomp and power of the upper world in the last day, to execute judgment upon all. Whatever uncertainty we are at, or whatever mistakes may arise about the time of his coming, his coming itself is certain. This has been the faith and hope of all Christians in all ages of the church; nay, it was the faith and hope of the Old-Testament saints, ever since Enoch the seventh from Adam, who said, *Behold, the Lord cometh*, etc., ~~Gen~~ Jude 1:14.

2. At the second coming of Christ all the saints will be gathered together to him; and this mention of the gathering of the saints together unto Christ at his coming shows that the apostle speaks of Christ's coming to judgment day, and not of his coming to destroy Jerusalem. He speaks of a proper, and not a metaphorical advent: and, as it will be part of Christ's honour in that day, so it will be the completing of the happiness of his saints.

(1.) That they all shall be gathered together. There will then be a general meeting of all the saints, and none but saints; all the Old-Testament saints, who got acquaintance with Christ by the dark shadows of the law, and saw this day at a distance; and all the New-Testament saints, to whom life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel; they will all be gathered together. There will then come from the four winds of heaven all that are,

or ever were, or ever shall be, from the beginning to the end of time. All shall be gathered together.

(2.) That they shall be gathered *together to Christ*. He will be the great centre of their unity. They shall be gathered together to him, to be attendants on him, to be assessors with him, to be presented by him to the Father, to be with him for ever, and altogether happy in his presence to all eternity.

(3.) The doctrine of Christ's coming and our gathering together to him is of a great moment and importance to Christians; otherwise it would not be the proper matter of the apostle's obtestation. We ought therefore not only to believe these things, but highly to account of them also, and look upon them as things we are greatly concerned in and should be much affected with.

II. The thing itself against which the apostle cautions the Thessalonians is that they should not be deceived about the time of Christ's coming, and so *be shaken in mind, or be troubled*. Note, Errors in the mind tend greatly to weaken our faith, and cause us trouble; and such as are weak in faith and of troubled minds are oftentimes apt to be deceived, and fall a prey to seducers.

1. The apostle would not have them be deceived: *Let no man deceive you by any means*, v. 3. There are many who lie in wait to deceive, and they have many ways of deceiving; we have reason therefore to be cautious and stand upon our guard. Some deceivers will pretend new revelations, others misinterpret scripture, and others will be guilty of gross forgeries; divers means and artifices of deceit men will use; but we must be careful that no man deceive us by any means. The particular matter in which the apostle cautions them not to be deceived is about the near approach of Christ's coming, as if it was to have been in the apostle's days; and harmless as this error might seem to many, yet, because it was indeed an error, it would have proved of bad consequences to many persons. Therefore,

2. He gives them warning, and would not have them be soon shaken in mind, nor be troubled.

(1.) He would not have their faith weakened. We should firmly believe the second coming of Christ, and be settled and established in the faith of this; but there was danger lest the Thessalonians, if they apprehended the

coming of Christ was just at hand, upon finding that they, or others whom they too much regarded, were mistaken as to the time, should thereupon question the truth or certainty of the thing itself; whereas they ought not to waver in their minds as to this great thing, which is the faith and hope of all the saints. False doctrines are like winds, that toss the water to and fro, and they are apt to unsettle the minds of men, who are sometimes as unstable as water. Then,

(2.) He would not have their comforts lessened, that they should not be troubled nor affrighted with false alarms. It is probable that the coming of Christ was represented in so much terror as to trouble many serious Christians among them, though in itself it should be matter of the believer's hope and joy; or else many might be troubled with the thought how surprising this day would be, or with the fear of their unpreparedness, or upon the reflection on their mistake about the time of Christ's coming: we should always watch and pray, but must not be discouraged nor uncomfortable at the thought of Christ's coming.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-12

APOSTASY FORETOLD

In these words the apostle confutes the error against which he had cautioned them, and gives the reasons why they should not expect the coming of Christ as just at hand. There were several events previous to the second coming of Christ; in particular, he tells them there would be,

I. A general apostasy, *there would come a falling away first*, v. 3. By this apostasy we are not to understand a defection in the state, or from civil government, but in spiritual or religious matters, from sound doctrine, instituted worship and church government, and a holy life. The apostle speaks of some very great apostasy, not only of some converted Jews or Gentiles, but such as should be very general, though gradual, and should give occasion to the revelation of rise of *antichrist*, that *man of sin*. This, he says (v. 5), he had told them of when he was with them, with design, no doubt, that they should not take offence nor be stumbled at it. And let us observe that no sooner was Christianity planted and rooted in the world than there began to be a defection in the Christian church. It was so in the Old-Testament church; presently after any considerable advance made in

religion there followed a defection: soon after the promise there was revolting; for example, soon after men began to call upon the name of the Lord all flesh corrupted their way, — soon after the covenant with Noah the Babel-builders bade defiance to heaven, — soon after the covenant with Abraham his seed degenerated in Egypt, — soon after the Israelites were planted in Canaan, when the first generation was worn off, they forsook God and served Baal, — soon after God's covenant with David his seed revolted, and served other gods, — soon after the return out of captivity there was a general decay of piety, as appears by the story of Ezra and Nehemiah; and therefore it was no strange thing that after the planting of Christianity there should come a falling away.

II. A revelation of that man of sin, that is (v. 3), antichrist would take his rise from this general apostasy. The apostle afterwards speaks of the revelation of that wicked one (v. 8), intimating the discovery which should be made of his wickedness, in order to his ruin: here he seems to speak of his rise, which should be occasioned by the general apostasy he had mentioned, and to intimate that all sorts of false doctrines and corruptions should centre in him. Great disputes have been as to who or what is intended by this man of sin and son of perdition: and, if it be not certain that the papal power and tyranny are principally or only intended, yet this is plain, What is here said does very exactly agree thereto. For observe,

1. The names of this person, or rather the state and power here spoken of. He is called the man of sin, to denote his egregious wickedness; not only is he addicted to, and practises, wickedness himself, but he also promotes, countenances, and commands sin and wickedness in others; and he is the son of perdition, because he himself is devoted to certain destruction, and is the instrument of destroying many others both in soul and body. These names may properly be applied, for these reasons, to the papal state; and thereto agree also,

2. The characters here given, v. 4.

(1.) That he *opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped*; and thus have the bishops of Rome not only opposed God's authority, and that of the civil magistrates, who are called gods, but have exalted themselves above God and earthly governors, in demanding greater regard to their commands than to the commands of God or the magistrate.

(2.) As God, he sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. As God was in the temple of old, and worshipped there, and is in and with his church now, so the antichrist here mentioned is some usurper of God's authority in the Christian church, who claims divine honours; and to whom can this better apply than to the bishops of Rome, to whom the most blasphemous titles have been given, as *Dominus Deus noster papa* — *Our Lord God the pope; Deus alter in terris* — *Another God on earth; Idem est dominium Dei et papae* — *The dominion of God and the pope is the same?*

3. His rise is mentioned, v. 6, 7. Concerning this we are to observe two things: —

(1.) There was something that hindered or withheld, or *let, until it was taken away*. This is supposed to be the power of the Roman empire, which the apostle did not think fit to mention more plainly at that time; and it is notorious that, while this power continued, it prevented the advances of the bishops of Rome to that height of tyranny to which soon afterwards they arrived.

(2.) This mystery of iniquity was gradually to arrive at its height; and so it was in effect that the universal corruption of doctrine and worship in the Romish church came in by degrees, and the usurpation of the bishops of Rome was gradual, not all at once; and thus the mystery of iniquity did the more easily, and almost insensibly, prevail. The apostle justly calls it a *mystery of iniquity*, because wicked designs and actions were concealed under false shows and pretences, at least they were concealed from the common view and observation. By pretended devotion, superstition and idolatry were advanced; and, by a pretended zeal for God and his glory, bigotry and persecution were promoted. And he tells us that this mystery of iniquity did even then begin, or did *already work*. While the apostles were yet living, *the enemy came, and sowed tares*; there were then the *deeds of the Nicolaitans*, persons who pretended zeal for Christ, but really opposed him. Pride, ambition, and worldly interest of church-pastors and church-rulers, as in Diotrefes and others, were the early working of the mystery of iniquity, which, by degrees, came to that prodigious height which has been visible in the church of Rome.

4. The fall or ruin of the antichristian state is declared, v. 8. The head of this antichristian kingdom is called *that wicked one*, or that lawless person who sets up a human power in competition with, and contradiction to, the

divine dominion and power of the Lord Jesus Christ; but, as he would thus manifest himself to be the man of sin, so the revelation or discovery of this to the world would be the sure presage and the means of his ruin. The apostle assures the Thessalonians that the Lord would consume and destroy him; the consuming of him precedes his final destruction, and that is by the *Spirit of his mouth*, by his word of command; the pure word of God, accompanied with the Spirit of God, will discover this mystery of iniquity, and make the power of antichrist to consume and waste away; and in due time it will be totally and finally destroyed, and this will be by the brightness of Christ's coming. Note, The coming of Christ to destroy the wicked will be with peculiar glory and eminent lustre and brightness.

5. The apostle further describes the reign and rule of this man of sin. Here we are to observe,

(1.) The manner of his coming, or ruling, and working: in general, that it is after the example of Satan, the grand enemy of souls, the great adversary of God and man. He is the great patron of error and lies, the sworn enemy of the truth as it is in Jesus and all the faithful followers of Jesus. More particularly, it is with Satanical power and deceit. A divine power is pretended for the support of this kingdom, but it is only after the working of Satan. Signs and wonders, visions and miracles, are pretended; by these the papal kingdom was first set up, and has all along been kept up, but they have false signs to support false doctrines; and lying wonders, or only pretended miracles that have served their cause, things false in fact, or fraudulently managed, to impose upon the people: and the diabolical deceits with which the antichristian state has been supported are notorious. The apostle calls it *all deceivableness of unrighteousness*, v. 10. Others may call them pious frauds, but the apostle called them unrighteous and wicked frauds; and, indeed, all fraud (which is contrary to truth) is an impious thing. Many are the subtle artifices the man of sin has used, and various are the plausible pretences by which he had beguiled unwary and unstable souls to embrace false doctrines, and submit to his usurped dominion.

(2.) The persons are described who are his willing subjects, or most likely to become such, v. 10. They are such as *love not the truth that they may be saved*. They heard the truth (it may be), but they did not love it; they could not bear sound doctrine, and therefore easily imbibed false doctrines; they had some notional knowledge of what was true, but they indulged some

powerful prejudices, and so became a prey to seducers. Had they loved the truth, they would have persevered in it, and been preserved by it; but no wonder if they easily parted with what they never had any love to. And of these persons it is said that they perish or are lost; they are in a lost condition, and in danger to be lost for ever. For,

6. We have the *sin and ruin of the subjects* of antichrist's kingdom declared, v. 11, 12.

(1.) Their sin is this: *They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*: they did not love the truth, and therefore they did not believe it; and, because they did not believe the truth, therefore they had pleasure in unrighteousness, or in wicked actions, and were pleased with false notions. Note, An erroneous mind and vicious life often go together and help forward one another.

(2.) Their ruin is thus expressed: *God shall send them strong delusions, to believe a lie*. Thus he will punish men for their unbelief, and for their dislike of the truth and love to sin and wickedness; not that God is the author of sin, but in righteousness he sometimes withdraws his grace from such sinners as are here mentioned; he gives them over to Satan, or leaves them to be deluded by his instruments; he gives them up to their own hearts' lusts, and leaves them to themselves, and then sin will follow of course, yea, the worst of wickedness, that shall end at last in eternal damnation. God is just when he inflicts spiritual judgments here, and eternal punishments hereafter, upon those who have no love to the truths of the gospel, who will not believe them, nor live suitably to them, but indulge false doctrines in their minds, and wicked practices in their lives and conversations.

<SIB> 2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-15

APOSTASY FORETOLD

Here observe,

I. The consolation the Thessalonians might take against the terrors of this apostasy, v. 13, 14. For they were chosen to salvation, and called to the obtaining of glory. Note, When we hear of the apostasy of many, it is

matter of great comfort and joy that there is a remnant according to the election of grace which does and shall persevere; and especially we should rejoice if we have reason to hope that we are of that number. The apostle reckoned himself bound in duty to be thankful to God on this account: *We are bound to give thanks to God always for you.* He had often given thanks on their behalf, and he is still abounding in thanksgiving for them; and there was good reason, because they were beloved by the Lord, as appeared in this matter — their security from apostatizing. This preservation of the saints is owing,

1. To the stability of the election of grace, v. 13. Therefore were they beloved of the Lord, because God had chosen them from the beginning. He had loved them with an everlasting love. Concerning this election of God we may observe,

(1.) The eternal date of it — it is from the beginning; not the beginning of the gospel, but the beginning of the world, before the foundation of the world, ^{<400>}Ephesians 1:4. Then,

(2.) The end to which they were chosen — salvation, complete and eternal salvation from sin and misery, and the full fruition of all good.

(3.) The means in order to obtaining this end — *sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.* The decree of election therefore connects the end and the means, and these must not be separated. We are not the elected of God because we were holy, but that we might be holy. Being chosen of God, we must not live as we list; but, if we are chosen to salvation as the end, we must be prepared for it by sanctification as the necessary means to obtain that end, which sanctification is by the operation of the Holy Spirit as the author and by faith on our part. There must be the belief of the truth, without which there can be by true sanctification, nor perseverance in grace, nor obtaining of salvation. Faith and holiness must be joined together, as well as holiness and happiness; therefore our Saviour prayed for Peter that his faith might not fail (^{<222>}Luke 22:32), and for his disciples (^{<477>}John 17:17), *Sanctify them by thy truth; thy word is truth.*

2. To the efficacy of the gospel call, v. 14. As they were chosen to salvation, so they were called thereunto by the gospel. Whom he did predestinate those he also called, ^{<480>}Romans 8:30. The outward call of God is by the gospel; and this is rendered effectual by the inward operation of the Spirit. Note, Wherever the gospel comes it calls and

invites men to the obtaining of glory; it is a call to honour and happiness, even the *glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*, the glory he has purchased, and the glory he is possessed of, to be communicated unto those who believe in him and obey his gospel; such shall be with Christ, to behold his glory, and they shall be glorified with Christ and partake of his glory. Hereupon there follows,

II. An exhortation to steadfastness and perseverance: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast*, v. 15. Observe, He does not say, “You are chosen to salvation, and therefore you may be careless and secure;” but *therefore stand fast*. God’s grace in our election and vocation is so far from superseding our diligent care and endeavour that it should quicken and engage us to the greatest resolution and diligence. So the apostle John having told those to whom he wrote that they had received the anointing which should abide in them, and that they should abide in him (in Christ), subjoins this exhortation, *Now abide in him*, ~~1~~ 1 John 2:27, 28. The Thessalonians are exhorted to steadfastness in their Christian profession, to *hold fast the traditions which they had been taught*, or the doctrine of the gospel, which had been delivered by the apostle, by word or epistle. As yet the canon of scripture was not complete, and therefore some things were delivered by the apostles in their preaching, under the guidance of the infallible Spirit, which Christians were bound to observe as coming from God; other things were afterwards by them committed to writing, as the apostle had written a former epistle to these Thessalonians; and these epistles were written as the writers were moved by the Holy Ghost. Note, There is no argument hence for regarding oral traditions in our days, now that the canon of scripture is complete, as of equal authority with the sacred writings. Such doctrines and duties as were taught by the inspired apostles we must steadfastly adhere to; but we have no certain evidence of any thing delivered by them more than what we find contained in the holy scriptures.

~~5126~~ 2 THESSALONIANS 2:16-17

APOSTOLIC PRAYER

In these words we have the apostle’s earnest prayer for them, in which observe,

I. To whom he prays: *Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father.* We may and should direct our prayers, not only to God the Father, through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also *to our Lord Jesus Christ himself*; and should pray in his name unto God, not only as his Father but as our Father in and through him.

II. From what he takes encouragement in his prayer — from the consideration of what God had already done for him and them: *Who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace,* v. 16. Here observe,

1. The love of God is the spring and fountain of all the good we have or hope for; our election, vocation, justification, and salvation, are all owing to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

2. From this fountain in particular all our consolation flows. And the consolation of the saints is an everlasting consolation. The comforts of the saints are not dying things; they shall not die with them. The spiritual consolations God gives none shall deprive them of; and God will not take them away: because he love them with an everlasting love, therefore they shall have everlasting consolation.

3. Their consolation is founded on the hope of eternal life. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God, and are not only patient, but joyful, in tribulations; and there is good reason for these strong consolations, because the saints have good hope: their hope is grounded on the love of God, the promise of God, and the experience they have had of the power, the goodness, and the faithfulness of God, and it is good hope through grace; the free grace and mercy of God are what they hope for, and what their hopes are founded on, and not on any worth or merit of their own.

III. What it is that he asks of God for them — that *he would comfort their hearts, and establish them in every good word and work,* v. 17. God had given them consolations, and he prayed that they might have more abundant consolation. There was good hope, through grace, that they would be preserved, and he prayed that they might be established: it is observable how comfort and establishment are here joined together. Note therefore,

1. Comfort is a means of establishment; for the more pleasure we take in the word, and work, and ways of God, the more likely we shall be to persevere therein. And,

2. Our establishment in the ways of God is a likely means in order to comfort; whereas, if we are wavering in faith, and of a doubtful mind, or if we are halting and faltering in our duty, no wonder if we are strangers to the pleasures and joys of religion. What is it that lies at the bottom of all our uneasiness, but our unsteadiness in religion? We must be established in every good word and work, in the word of truth and the work of righteousness: Christ must be honoured by our good works and good words; and those who are sincere will endeavour to do both, and in so doing they may hope for comfort and establishment, till at length their holiness and happiness be completed.