

In a letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul speaks of a future event he calls "*the day of the Lord.*" He writes:

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 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.

"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;" (2.THESS 2:1-3).

Some theologians believe the "*day of the Lord*" Paul refers to here is the final judgment. However, I believe with most scholars that Paul is speaking of Christ's second coming. And Paul states that Jesus' return will not take place until two things happen:

1. **A great apostasy will occur.** Many who once knew God will fall away from the truth of the gospel they've known.
2. **The Antichrist, or man of sin, will be "revealed."**

It should be obvious to every lover of Jesus that a "falling away" is already taking place. Many believers today, as well as Christians throughout the past few decades, have grown cold in their love for God. With that in mind, I'd like to focus on Paul's second point - that the day of the Lord won't come until the "*man of sin is revealed.*"

What, exactly, does Paul mean by this phrase? Is he saying Jesus won't come back until the Antichrist has been enthroned as a world ruler, and we all know his identity? I don't think so. Paul knew that Christ could return at any moment. Jesus Himself says He'll

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come when least expected, in the twinkling of an eye.

I believe we find a key to Paul's meaning in his use of the word "revealed." The Greek meaning here is "uncovered." I believe Paul is saying, "Jesus won't come until the Antichrist's full plan and agenda are exposed, and the church is made aware of it."

Of course, the Antichrist's plan has already been exposed in scripture. Paul declares, "*The mystery of iniquity doth already work...*" (2.THESS 2:7). He's saying that a mysterious form of sin, even now at work, will usher in the Antichrist. Apparently, a spirit of iniquity will fall upon lost humanity, gripping people's hearts so powerfully that the man of sin will ascend to power quickly.

Yet there is another meaning to this phrase, "*mystery of iniquity.*" It comes from a Greek root meaning "silent initiation." Paul is talking about a secret initiation into the cult of the Antichrist - a subtle, demonic influence he saw taking place in his own day.

Right now, this same mysterious spirit is at full seductive power, preparing masses of people to receive the man of sin. Thousands daily are being brainwashed, silently and in secret, to be initiated into his fold. And this satanic work is happening so fast and so

efficiently, the man of sin could ascend to power in the not-too-distant future.

We don't need to see some physical revelation of the Antichrist before Jesus will come back. His satanic spirit is already being manifested in thousands of brainwashed believers!

Paul Fully Explains the "Mystery of Iniquity."

Paul says the mystery is simply this: Satan is going to seduce masses into depths of lawlessness! The Greek word Paul uses for iniquity in this passage means, literally, lawlessness. Therefore, the mystery is one of lawlessness - meaning, multitudes are going to act without law or restraint.

Yet, this lawlessness is not simply a rebellion against the rule of man. It's not about rebelling against civil authority, or about committing robbery, rape or murder. These things do provoke God's wrath. But the mystery of lawlessness goes much deeper. It is an outright rejection of the truth that is in Christ - a casting aside of God's Holy Word and commands. It is rebellion against the restraints of holy scripture!

This spirit of lawlessness is rampant in our nation today. It's the very force behind the legislation that seeks to banish God from our

society. This is the same spirit that satan used to deceive Eve. He told her, in so many words, "God is easy - He won't punish you for disobeying. You can eat the fruit and indulge your lust. You won't have to pay for it!"

That was a deadly lie from hell. And satan is using the same lie on Christians today to advance his mystery of lawlessness. Day after day, he's convincing masses of believers they can indulge their sins without paying any penalty. It's a demonic scheme to pervert Christ's gospel of grace, turning it into a message of licentiousness!

Tragically, many lukewarm Christians are succumbing to this spirit of lawlessness. Some have already been initiated into the cult of the Antichrist. They're ripe to accept the man of sin when he comes on the scene, working miracles and solving problems.

You may think, "I would never be fooled into following the Antichrist." But Paul says the Antichrist will rise to power because people will be blinded and deceived by their own sin: *"...after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."* (2.THESS 2:9-10).

Satan will deceive masses of people by convincing them of a subtle but powerful lie. What will his lie be? He'll convince the world as he convinced Eve: "God doesn't punish for sin!"

Paul says this deception will come *"...with all deceivableness... because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."* (VERSE 10). He then adds, *"...for this cause [reason], God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:"* (VERSE 11).

The apostle is saying, "Those who refuse to obey or respect God's Word will fall under a powerful delusion. At first they'll wink at their sin. They'll justify it. But soon they'll actively seek out a message of easy grace. They'll invent a grace that is far beyond what God intended. His grace never leads to license. It always leads to repentance!"

Our Nation Is Right Now Under a Strong Delusion!

America today is under the seductive power of a satanic lie. Yet,

before I say anything more, please know I speak here not as a Democrat or a Republican. What I have to say has nothing to do with politics - but everything to do with spiritual truth. The fact is, our nation's leaders have cast aside God's Word completely, showing no respect for biblical truth. And now the Lord has allowed a deception to fall upon us!

The demonic lie blanketing America today is a false peace. It's the idea that we can do whatever we please with no fear of consequences. We've already crossed a line in this deception - and now judgment is inevitable.

Paul lays out this divine judgment in Romans 1. He speaks of those who once held to biblical truth but later tried to retain the truth in unrighteousness. In short, they wanted God's Word and their lust at the same time. So the Lord turned them over to reprobate minds. They wanted to believe a lie - so He sent a strong delusion upon them!

This is the very state our nation is in right now. The President told the entire country, "I didn't commit this sin," but later he was exposed for committing the very act he named. Today, eighty percent of Americans have turned a blind eye to both his sin and his lie, saying none of it matters. As prophesied, truth is fallen in the streets.

Americans are also gambling on the stock market like drunken sailors - and they're prospering. In addition, a survey says sixty-five percent of college students cheat and think there's nothing wrong with it. People of all ages are treating God's laws casually, thinking, "What I'm doing must be okay, because I'm getting away with it."

Now this very attitude has crept into the church. Multitudes of Christians today watch R-rated videos or surf the Internet indulging in pornography. At one time their consciences would have tormented them. But now they reason, "All of our leaders are getting away with it. Everybody's doing it. Why can't I?" They've fallen under a demonic delusion!

It's true - we constantly hear lies, cover-ups and manipulations from our nation's capital. But the strong delusion our nation is under isn't simply about the sordid mess in Washington, D.C. No, satan's deceiving power goes far beyond

those treacheries and depravity. His big lie is an outpouring from hell against God's people!

Paul warns, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables [lies]"* (2.TIM 4:3-4).

Who are these deceived masses Paul is talking about? They're deceived Christians! He wrote this letter to the Thessalonian church - to born-again believers! He was addressing people who had sat under biblical teaching and known God's truth. Yet they had held onto their lusts - and now they sought out heresies that would comfort them in their sins!

I Believe Deceived Christians Will Be Among Those Who Pledge the Greatest Allegiance to the Antichrist!

The wicked have always been "destitute" of the truth - despising it, trampling it, mocking it with disdain. I saw an example of this recently in the New York Post, as one writer confidently declared, "Science has now replaced faith."

But Paul's greater concern was always for those who'd known the way of truth, confessing their faith in Christ, yet who flirted with sin. Paul wrote of those who attempt to hold the truth in unrighteousness - an act that enrages God. *"Who changed the truth of God into a lie... for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections..."* (ROM 1:25-26).

Others, held in bondage by their lustful pleasures, turned to false teachers to try to find peace. They ended up accepting *"...damnable heresies... and many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."* (2.PET 2:1-2).

All of Paul's messages on apostasy and the Antichrist were aimed at such carnal Christians. They weren't meant for the idolaters of Rome, the heathen of Greece, the pagan tribes in unknown places. Paul's message was one of great importance to the church - and he wrote it to be read in churches, directly to believers!

You see, Paul was calling God's people everywhere to love the truth - to search it out, study it and obey it. He wrote, in essence, "Let the truth be your guide! Don't turn aside from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to

give you eyes to see it, ears to hear it, and a heart to love it. Otherwise, you'll open yourself to deception - and you'll end up believing a lie. Satan will be able to initiate you into the cult of Antichrist!"

I witnessed this kind of deception recently as I viewed a videotape of a prosperity-gospel convention. I could hardly believe what I saw. An evangelist told the audience, "You're all going to get drunk tonight!" - meaning, I supposed, drunk on the Spirit. But soon many in the congregation were staggering around like literal drunks!

The evangelist himself was held up by two assistants, who paraded him in front of the congregation. At times this man hissed like a snake. Others in the audience crawled on the floor, howled like wild animals or doubled up with "holy" laughter.

At one point, a musician began singing, "Run for the money!" The song's lyrics said, in essence, "If you run hard and fast enough, you'll get rich, rich, rich!" Suddenly, people began racing wildly around the building, singing, "Run to get rich!"

Please understand - these people were not ignoramuses. They were all well-dressed and seemed intelligent. As I watched them I thought, "Who has bewitched these people? How could they accept such a foolish, unscriptural gospel?"

I concluded that at one time most of them had sat under a true gospel and heard convicting messages. But apparently they didn't want to hear that plain, simple gospel anymore - and now they had bought a lie. They had a lust for money - a spirit of covetousness - and so they ended up seeking out this prosperity teacher. He would teach them how to serve both God and mammon!

I'm convinced those people could listen to a powerful sermon exposing their whole false system of faith - and yet they would never hear a word of it. They'd been given over to a strong delusion - and they believed the devil's lie! Paul called such deluded Christians *"...men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith."* (2.TIM 3:8). They knew the truth, but they resented it!

I believe the Antichrist is going to arrive as the greatest prosperity preacher of all time. He'll surely be a religious personality, someone who promises health and wealth.

And those who are being brainwashed right now by false teachers will end up being his strongest supporters. They'll accept him as a true man of God.

If you don't believe this, simply recall the scriptures. The Bible says that in the days just prior to Jesus' return, satan will bring such an overwhelming flood of seduction, he'll attempt to deceive even the elect, if that were possible. It won't matter how long a Christian has walked with Jesus; he'll face temptations he's never had in his life. Even the strongest believer will be tempted to doubt God's faithfulness and mistrust His Holy Word.

The Believer in the Greatest Danger of Being Deceived Is the One Who Gladly Hears God's Word - But Won't Obey It!

Paul writes to the Galatians, *"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?"* (GAL 5:7). *"...who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth?"* (GAL 3:1). The apostle was asking his flock, "What happened to you? You were doing so well. But now you've been brainwashed!"

Throughout scripture, God gives us a clear picture of how important it is for us to obey His Word. We see one such example in the life of King Saul. God gave Saul clear, specific commands through the prophet Samuel. He instructed Saul, *"Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."* (1.SAM 15:3).

Did Saul obey this command from the Lord? Scripture tells us, *"Saul smote the Amalekites... and he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive... Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them..."* (VERSES 7-9).

God had given His Word to Saul in crystal-clear terms. Yet after Saul went into battle, he obeyed the Lord only in part. Rather than destroying everyone and everything, he spared king Agag - and he even kept some of the spoils of battle.

Samuel was grief-stricken at this. He told Saul, *"The LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore*

then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?" (VERSES 18-19).

At this point, Scripture gives us a grievous, chilling word: *"Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments..."* (VERSES 10-11).

Does this describe your life? Has God told you in no uncertain terms to deal with a certain lustful habit in your life - yet you keep clinging to it, refusing to cut it off?

Right now, His Spirit may be speaking to you in a kind, wooing voice, saying, "Your lust stands between us, interrupting our communion. I can no longer bless you while you persist in it. Trust my Spirit to help you. Lay it down now, my child." But soon God may speak to you in anger, saying, "If you won't lay down your lust, I'll expose it - and it will destroy your life!"

God rejected Saul for his disobedience. Samuel told Saul, *"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."* (VERSE 23).

That's when God's Spirit left Saul. The king's halfhearted obedience had opened him up to satan's influence. Soon an evil spirit troubled Saul - and he ended up seeking counsel from a witch!

Perhaps as you read the account of Saul's life, you wonder, "But Saul tried his best. And he didn't do that badly. Why was God so severe on him? Why didn't he forgive Saul?"

God is telling us through this passage that He means what He says! He's saying, "I'm showing you how I feel about your obedience to Me. I want all your heart, all your love - not just a halfhearted obedience!"

Now, if the Lord's message to Saul had been foggy or unclear, we'd be justified in saying He should have made an allowance for Saul. But His direction to Saul was so clear; there was no doubting what He commanded. Likewise today, we have no doubt about what God has spoken to us. We know what His commandments are, because He has revealed them to us by His Word and by His Spirit within our hearts.

You may answer, "But what God did to Saul happened under the Old Covenant, under the Law. We live in a day of grace now. Surely the Lord won't be as severe on us when we disobey as He was on Saul."

Here is God's Word on the matter under the New Covenant, a covenant of grace:

"(God) will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;

"But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God." (ROM 2:6-11).

Let me spell out the difference for you between Saul in the Old Testament and all believers under the New Covenant: whenever a person truly has a desire to obey God's commands - when that person loves and respects God's Word - the Holy Ghost supplies him with all power and ability to fulfill those commands. That is the blessed provision of the New Covenant.

Saul didn't have that kind of holy desire. **But any believer who truly loves the Lord and His Word is able to mortify all lust, bringing down sin's dominion by the power of the Holy Spirit within him.**

Paul gives this strong word of warning to the believer: *"Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* (ROM 2:3). He's saying, "Are you testifying that you're a Christian, telling everyone to obey God's laws - yet you're in adultery yourself?"

"Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (ROM 2:4). Paul adds, "God has been merciful to you all

this time, dealing with you kindly and lovingly. Don't you realize all His goodness, mercy and grace are meant to lead you to repentance?"

What Is the Point of This Message?

I want to say this to you above all else: the Antichrist is going to come on the scene as the greatest prosperity preacher in all of history. And the devil is already picking halfhearted believers to be initiated into his cult. Soon there will be no more restraints on our society, and Christians will be more vulnerable than ever to demonic seductions.

This is just what happened to many German Christians in Hitler's day. When Hitler came to power, with a charismatic personality and promises of the good life, even lukewarm Lutherans and Pentecostals accepted him. And later, as he began to work his evil on society, they looked the other way, rejecting the truth of God's Word.

Of course, some powerful voices for the gospel rose up in those churches. But a shocking number of believers ended up following Hitler and even praising him, crying, "Heil (or, "Hail!") Hitler!" They bought the lie - and God put them under a strong delusion!

I ask you: Do you sit under strong preaching that lovingly exposes your sin? If so, do you allow that word to convict you? Or, do you go right back to your lust without grieving at all?

If you're rejecting the warnings of the restraining Holy Ghost - if you're disobeying God time after time, without any heart-grief - then you're being recruited for the cult of Antichrist. The devil is silently initiating you into his mystery of iniquity. And when the promising, miracle-working Antichrist comes along, you'll be swept up in his lies and given over to a delusion!

Listen to what Paul says about compromising believers who refuse to love and obey God's Holy Word: *"That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."* (2.THESS 2:12). Woe to those who know the truth about their

lusts, but who don't believe God will judge them!

Here are the ominous results of not believing and acting on God's truth:

1. The heart becomes hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

2. Satan works on the hardened heart to justify itself, so that it's relieved from all fear of penalty.

3. When God sees there is no possibility that this heart will receive and obey truth, he turns the person over to satanic delusion.

4. The believer becomes blinded by the lie that says there are no wages for sin and no judgment day, and that he can get away with his lustful pleasure.

5. The believer falls prey to doctrines of demons, thinking evil is good and good is evil.

6. He eventually drifts so far from Christ and the truth, he becomes blinded to who the Antichrist is - and he ends up worshiping and serving him as a god.

7. On Judgment day, God will say to such a person, "Depart from me, you worker of iniquity!"

Beloved, it doesn't have to be this way for any of us. God has made a covenant promise to remove all delusion from us and give us victory over sin, through the power of Christ's cross. All He asks is that we declare war on our sin, saying, "I won't make peace with this habit. I refuse to abide it. Deliver me, Father, by Your Spirit!" When He hears this prayer, He'll send such Holy Ghost power and glory from heaven, the devil won't stand a chance!

Pray right now that God implants in you a great reverence for His Word. Ask him to help you be disciplined in your reading of the scriptures. And ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what you read - to believe that God means what He says!

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