

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Loving the Truth vs. Loving a Lie

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is 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. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:5–12, KJV 1900)

While this late arriving deceiver is not Satan, he is obviously tightly aligned with Satan. His "...coming is after the working of Satan." One of Satan's most successful tactics is to convince naïve Christians that he looks pretty much like the comic character, dressed in a solid red, skin-tight suit, complete with horns and a long tail with a sharp point on the end, spear in hand. And these naïve souls will think in terms of that image and convince themselves that they've never seen that fellow in their entire lifetime, so why be upset or bothered by him. Perhaps he doesn't really exist at all since we've never seen him in this form.

Sadly often, well meaning Bible students resort more to speculation in their interpretations of such passages as 2 Thessalonians 2 than to sound contextual exegesis, imposing their private opinions onto the passage instead of drawing conclusions from the passage. In this context, Paul reminds us that this wicked "man of sin" **shall be revealed and consumed** by Jesus at His glorious, victorious, and final return. If he **shall be revealed**, take note. He is not now revealed, so we should avoid speculation about his identity until the Lord reveals him.

...with all power and signs and lying wonders. If you choose to ignore the first two marks of this beast, power and signs, do not miss the third, "*lying wonders.*" Satan with all of his efforts and designs can only succeed if he convinces people to believe his lie, and he can throw in some powerful "wonders" along the way to lead the unsuspecting to believe that his ideas are actually coming from God, not from him. (John 8:44; 2 Timothy 3:8) Through several of the plagues that Moses brought upon Egypt, the Egyptian magicians duplicated the plague and thereby tried to dismiss Moses as merely another phony magician, not a prophet of the one true and living God.

Our culture champions the rugged individualistic spirit in man. Satan and his minions love to cultivate this attitude to the point of disconnect. Make a single believer think that he is a better Christian, knows more about the Bible than anyone else

knows, and is stronger in his faith than anyone else. Give him a mega-dose of the true "Rambo" spirit. And just like the fictional movie character, Rambo, this unsuspecting believer will isolate himself from other believers and go his own way in his often very sincere desire to oppose evil and to fight for what he rather blindly perceives to be true, right, and good. Once isolated, little does this poor soul know that Satan can pick him off at will, most often by further cultivating the ego that drives his pride-filled "I'm better, stronger, and know more than any other believer" attitude. (1 Timothy 3:6; Proverbs 16:18-19) How strongly does Scripture warn us against pride? Do you think the repeated and powerful warnings in Scripture might suggest that this attitude is one of Satan's favorite strategies, one that has proven incredibly successful for him over untold centuries? Why abandon a successful strategy? When believers leave Hollywood and its version of Rambo, they face the shattering reality; isolate yourself from other believers, and you are an easy target for Satan. Unlike the Hollywood Rambo, you will not end up as a hero, but as a crushed and disillusioned casualty with a shipwrecked faith.

...with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish. If something that is unrighteous is deceitful, how might the deceiver himself paint his error in the minds of the deceived? Would he not follow precisely the pattern that he so successfully used in the Garden of Eden? Convince the naïve believer that it is actually a very righteous thing, Solomon's warning of the way that seems right to a man, but the end of that way is death, not right. (Proverbs 14:12) So twist the most heinous of sins as to lead people to think how good it is. How many examples of this very tactic could we name from our present culture? The thought is honestly frightening.

One of the most diabolical such ideas that, thank the Lord, is not popular, but it occasionally appears in very religious clothing that covers up its sinister evil is the idea that God is active and causative in

every event that occurs, even in the most wicked of depraved men's sinful deeds. If Satan can work his evil in people and actually convince them that God is responsible, he has succeeded beyond even his own expectations. And how many Scriptures need we offer to prove that this sinister idea is not Biblical? (1 John 2:16-17) John doesn't single out a particular sin that is "...not of the Father," meaning that God didn't cause it, the mirror opposite to this errant view. He names a whole category of actions, all sinful and all of (As a source) this world, not of (As a source or cause) God the Father. The list of such Scriptures is large and simple in their conclusion, but this passage alone utterly refutes the deception of Satan, a sadly true example of his ability to convince people of one of his "lying wonders." How could one imagine a greater "lying wonder" than this notion that God and Satan are actually copartners in human conduct? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16; this passage categorically reveals that God and Satan never work together, but in perpetual irreconcilable conflict)

...in them that perish. Scripture often uses "perish" to refer to the people who shall spend eternity separated from God, but all appearances of the word do not convey this meaning. For example, the first prodigal son spoke these words from his "Pigpen, "I perish with hunger." (Luke 15:17) Was this man actually saying that he was entering eternal hell with hunger? No, he was no doubt sufficiently hungry to feel intense discomfort. In this context, however, it is likely that "them that perish" does refer to people who are outside the family and grace of God. The description of their future that follows distinctly points in that direction.

...because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. Take note. These words do not shift the blame from these wicked and willingly deceived people to God. Paul identifies a clear problem in the character of these people that prompts them to despise truth, not seek it or love it.

They prefer Satan's lie to God's truth. Nothing in this context implies that God is responsible for the condition that Paul describes in these people. They did something, or did not do something, and their failure, not God's arbitrary and diabolical action, prompted their present state of judgment. Ironically, in their punishment, God grants their desire to, above all else, evade the knowledge of His truth. (Romans 1:18-32) Their final condemnation rests, not in God, but in their own sinful choices and subsequent sins.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie. This is not the language of a cosmic puppeteer who is busy pulling strings and manipulating wicked people for his supposed glory or greater good. It is the Bible language of divine and righteous judgment against sinners. Compare this passage with Romans 1 where two times Paul says that "God gave them up..." God only "gave them up" to a lower pit of depravity after they knowingly, consciously, and

willingly chose to ignore God and His righteous warnings in their present condition. In our study passage, God doesn't first send strong delusion to deceive these people. He sends the strong delusion ***only after*** they have refused the knowledge they had and chose sin over righteousness, Satan's lie over God's truth, and the man of sin over God. Giving them up is an act of righteous judgment against committed sins, not a cosmic setup, put in motion to orchestrate their future conduct or state. (Job 21:14. Notice the righteous irony of this passage. Long before the day of God's final judgment against the wicked, a day when the divine sentence shall say, "Depart from me..." it is the wicked who say to God, "Depart from us..." In His judgment, God grants their wicked desire)

That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. The problem with these people is not simply that they did not believe the truth. The greater condemnation is well deserved because they "...had pleasure in unrighteousness." This description points to a state of total moral and spiritual depravity. Give one of these people two options, one righteous and the other sin. Every time he will not only choose the sin, but he will choose it with great pleasure. This is his choice, not God's manipulation.

The state of believing and of preferring a lie to the truth is a rather intimate trait of Satan and those who are wholly under his control.

Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. (John 8:43-45)

In this lesson, Jesus speaks to wicked men who were parading as religious men. They heard every word that He spoke, but they consciously chose not to hear the real truth that He spoke, "...because ye cannot hear my word." They were so in love with Satan's lie that they refused to hear the message of the personification of God and of His truth in person. In no point in this passage does Jesus impute the cause of their condemnation to God, but to those wicked men alone. They, not God or a secret decree, brought the condemnation they would face onto themselves.

This righteous judgment against sin and sinners for what they did stands out consistently in Scripture as God's basis for His final and righteous sentence against them. They want a world wholly void of God. They shall have it. (2 Thessalonians 1:9. What is the essence of their punishment? Utter and lasting separation "...***from the presence of the Lord,*** and from the glory of his power)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor