

National Public Radio's website listed 12 common half-truths... that many of us have accepted as facts. ... For instance... (you may have heard of this one)... various news organizations have recently pointed out that Subway's \$5 footlong sandwich... actually measures 11 inches instead of 12. ... (Subway has explained that their methods of baking the bread can cause a slight size differential.) ... Here are a few more half-truths the article explored:

1. Peanuts are not really nuts (and neither are Cashews or Brazil Nuts). Walnuts, pecans, and chestnuts are real nuts, but peanuts are actually legumes.
2. The American buffalo is a bison, not a buffalo. It's part of the Bovidae family, which includes domestic cattle and goats.
3. A koala bear is not a bear; it's a marsupial.
4. A palm tree is not a tree. Palm trees belong to the monocot family of flowering plants, which also includes grasses and grains.
5. "Swollen glands" are not actually glands; they are a series of lymph nodes.
6. A mountain goat is not really a goat.
7. Pink is not exactly a color. Physicists claim that pink should really be called "minus green" because "pink" is just the leftovers of white light when you take out the green.

You may have known about these... and simply tolerate the rest of our culture believing them to be true. ... It is rather harmless for others to have confidence in these half-truths. ... But today... our passage reveals a common misperception in present day evangelical Christianity... that should **not** be tolerated. It has great potential for harm. ... And yet... many people... in wonderful churches... glibly accept this detrimental belief.

I can remember back in the 1970's a new culture burst onto the scene. It was called "The Jesus Movement." ... This was when Rock and Roll came

into the church. Contemporary Christian music was born and churches no longer sang only hymns in worship. Church attire became much less formal. If a person came to church in a crumpled T-shirt and jeans... they were welcome. Music and Bible studies exploded across denominational lines. A quote from one of the bands that I liked is: "Long hair, short hair, some coats and ties, we just want to praise the Lord... Preacher isn't talking 'bout religion no more, we just want to praise the Lord. And it's very plain to see. It's not the way it used to be..."

The Jesus Movement broke down many denominational barriers... and taught that doctrine (or dogma) divides Christians from one another... Doctrine builds walls that must come down and never be put back up. We just need to get along... and that is more important than holding to your convictions. Agreement and unity was held in higher esteem than rightly dividing the Word of God. In fact... the end result was that doctrine came to be seen as something to be discarded. Christians don't need them. They are harmful and create all sorts of pride and prejudice. They divide... and the only way we are going to win the world for Christ... is if we get rid of them... be humble... and work alongside of anyone... even if they have the craziest beliefs.

I have benefitted from many things that came out of the Jesus movement. But the attitude that says doctrine is not important... and it should be done away with... is its own doctrine... and a detrimental belief.

Because of this pervasive attitude... many Christians since the Jesus Movement... have disregarded doctrine... and sadly... now only see bits and pieces of the Bible. They lack a big picture of how the Scriptures hold

together. ... Theology and doctrine provide that larger vision of the entire Bible. ... Those who neglect it are like the surf of the sea... they are vulnerable to be tossed all about... by all the winds of false doctrine that blow through. ... They pick-up and follow this cause... or that cause... not because of Biblical conviction... but only because it feels right.

This is exactly what happened to the Thessalonians. They had been driven by false doctrine into quite a tizzy... because they ignored the doctrines (about end times) that Paul had taught them. Paul reminds them of correct doctrine and tells them to use it like a compass to get them back to shore safely.

Please listen to this quote by *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*:

Nothing makes a man so virtuous as belief of the truth. A lying doctrine will soon beget a lying practice. A man cannot have an erroneous belief without by-and-by having an erroneous life. I believe the one thing naturally begets the other.

Now... before we get to today's passage... let me express what the doctrine that is taught by it... can do for you.

Sometimes our present conditions leave us with a lot of questions. "...God, how can You allow this to happen to me?" ... "Where are You God; have You forgotten me...?" "How can a loving God allow something like this...? Do You even care...?" ... "Why should I hold onto my Christian faith...? Evil people get what they want... and don't seem to suffer at all for their evil..." So what is at stake... if I throw the towel in... and join them...?" ... Paul's theology lesson sought to overcome such thoughts... which the Thessalonians were experiencing because of their severe persecution.

Another thing the doctrine taught in our passage today can do for us... is... it can give us some perspective on the Christmas season we are in right now. "Peace on earth...? – Yeah right! Who are we trying to kid...?" "Jesus may have come to bring peace... but He was rejected. King of Kings...? Lord of Lords...? He died. Some king! He left us with a bunch of teaching... some good morals... which no one follows. ... So what is the big deal about the Christmas story of baby... Who grew up and died...?"

The purpose of doctrine about the end times... is not for us to make a calendar... but (like all doctrine)... it is to build character. ...Paul emphasized this fact in both of his Thessalonian letters... and Jesus, Himself... warned us not to set dates for His coming (Matt. 24:36, 42). Date-setters are usually upsetters... and that is exactly what caused a big problem among the believers in Thessalonica.

What seems apparent... from reading 2 Thessalonians... is that someone had deceived the believers into thinking they were already living in the last days. Paul uses the phrase "Day of the Lord" for the events including and leading up to the return of Christ. ... From what Paul writes in today's passage... the date-setting... false teaching... probably first came through a "prophetic utterance" in one of their meetings... and then it was further enhanced by a letter claiming to come from Paul himself.

But the believers were instantly shaken by this teaching... and continued to be deeply troubled. ... Had God changed His program? ... Did Paul mislead them in his first letter when he promised they would **not** experience the Tribulation... by what he wrote not only in 1 Thes. 1:10... but then again in 1 Thes. 5:9...?

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (ESV)

and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV)

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

“...Can Paul be believed...? Can God be trusted...? This severe persecution sure feels like we’re in the midst of the prophesied tribulation...!”

To calm their hearts and stabilize their faith... Paul re-explained the doctrine he had already given them about the Day of the Lord... so they would have a compass to get safely to shore... and out of the turbulence of soul. He reminds them of the doctrinal truths that the Day of the Lord could not arrive... until certain other events had taken place.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

This section of verses contains doctrinal truth that is found nowhere else in the Bible. He gives it... in order to clarify what he had already taught them while he was with them... and in his first letter.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul had taught them that the day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night (1 Thes. 5:2). He wrote of this surprise in the context of his explaining the rapture. But how could this be true...? The persecutions they were currently experiencing seemed to be what the prophets had predicted... when they wrote about the great calamities coming on God’s people. ... What about this great re-union in

the clouds with the Lord and with their loved ones who had already died...?
That was supposed to happen first. Was that all one big mistake...?
Apparently had a false teaching going around that this was indeed the
case.

Paul had instructed the Thessalonians from the Old Testament...
concerning “the Day of the Lord... when he preached to them in person. ...
But what exactly is “the Day of the Lord”? In short... The day of the
Lord is the future period of time... prophesied repeatedly in the Old
Testament... during which God will bring judgment to non-believers - and
blessing to believers... here on earth... in a more direct... dramatic... and
drastic way than ever before. (Isa. 13:6, 9; Daniel 11; and Zeph. 1:14-16
are just three of the Old Testament passages.) From New Testament
revelation concerning this period of time... it seems that this will involve
several events... including the Rapture of the church... the 7 year
Tribulation... and then the return of Christ... which inaugurates the 1000-
year reign of Christ.

Verse 1... of today’s passage... “Now concerning the coming of our Lord
Jesus Christ (His return... His second coming when He will defeat and
punish all the evil in the world... and finally bring peace)... and this event
that you are being told isn’t true (our being gathered to Him) at the
rapture... Or in other words... “Concerning this future period of time known
as the Day of the Lord... which includes the rapture and the 2nd coming” ...
We ask you brothers...

2 Thessalonians 2:2

Doctrinal error does not calm. It upsets. It seems that they had been “shaken in mind” and “alarmed.” Together they show the great distress which error brought upon the believers. It took away their peace and hopes and brought uncertainties. Error is not in the business of bringing comfort to hearts. If Satan cannot keep you from being saved, he will try to disturb you so much that you cannot enjoy your salvation here on earth.

Now... there are a few observations I would like to make about the supposed authority... on which the false teaching that had upset them... was based... #1 – Spiritual error always seems to have gifted speakers who propagate error with clever rhetoric. ... And make no mistake... it would have HAD to have been purposeful deception... if it came as a letter seeming to have been from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Someone would have deliberately forged a letter to propagate this false teaching. So... #2... Deception proliferates error. Deception and error go hand-in-hand.

If these observations are true... and I think they are... then a great speaker... or a great author... does not mean it is the truth. These are often the channels of false doctrine.

Paul tells the Thessalonians... “I don’t care how credible they might seem... you need to be grounded in the big picture of God’s Word. Do not despise Bible doctrine. It is your antidote to being misled by impressive personalities and spectacular writers. You cannot take in what seems to be spiritual truth... simply because it “sounds good...”

Without Biblical doctrine... you and I are very vulnerable. ... The Thessalonians were defenseless... because they had been feeding their belief with their circumstances... so Paul seeks to nourish them with the Biblical doctrine that he had taught them.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5

In verse 3... the word for “rebellion” is “apostasia”... and it simply means departure. This is going to be an abandoning... or departure from the truth that God has revealed in His Word. ... Unfortunately... departure from God’s truth seems to have characterized the Christian church – almost from its inception. But this refers to a specific... distinguishable apostasy... that is associated with the future period of time called “the Day of the Lord.” ... Here are two descriptions of this departure (or abandoning) of God’s truth... that is described in 2 Timothy...

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

We might be able to build a case that you and I are living in a distinguishable period of time... where these passages characterize the church in general... as never before. ... Watch the most popular television preachers... and tell me we are not! ... You and I may be witnessing the “apostasia” right before our very eyes... But at the time of Paul’s writing to the Thessalonians... they had not yet seen... what we are watching. ... I believe that Paul told the Thessalonians that what we are seeing today... (the birth pangs...) had not yet happened... from their perspective... so the Day of the Lord could not possibly have come.

The second reason he gives for the certainty that the Thessalonians were not experiencing the events just prior to the Lord’s return... and that they had NOT missed the rapture... is that the man of Lawlessness... the son of destruction had not yet been revealed.

Paul is writing about the AntiChrist... a name used only in the New Testament by the Apostle John. But this is the same person. He is the last great world dictator of tremendous lawlessness... who will be empowered by Satan himself. To make sure that we know this is the same person, Paul used descriptions that Daniel wrote about in Daniel chapter 11.

This distinct adversary of God will seek to replace the worship of the true God and all false gods... with the worship of himself... and will proclaim **himself to be God**. The beast will tolerate the worship of no one or nothing but himself (as Rev. 13:5-8 reveals). He will set **himself up** on God’s throne **in** the inner sanctuary of **God’s temple**. I believe that this refers to the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem... which he will... perhaps help to rebuild... gaining the trust of the Jews. But then he will be revealed as the

AntiChrist... when he goes in to the most Holy Place and announces no one is to be worshipped but him. ... Such a person has not yet been spotlighted on the stage of human history... from the vantage point of when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians... or... from our vantage point today. The second coming of Christ... when He returns to earth... to put away all evil will not happen until that happens first. (The rapture can happen... but not the return of Christ to set up His earthly rule.)

Paul points them to the Biblical doctrine from Daniel... which he taught them when he was with them. According to Acts 17:2... Paul was only with them less than a month... but Paul did not regard prophetic truth as too deep or unimportant or controversial for new Christians. ... He believed it was a vital part of the whole counsel of God... so he taught it without hesitation or apology. (How different we are today...)

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7

Who or what is restraining the satanically empowered movement against God's law... and is postponing the revelation of the man of sin? ... The Holy Spirit of God is the only entity with sufficient (supernatural) power to do this restraining.

How does He do it? ... Through Christians... whom He indwells and through whom He works in society... to hold back the swelling tide of lawless living.

How will He be **taken out of the way?** To answer that I ask another question. Where does the Holy Spirit dwell today...? Inside the lives of the believer. ... When the church leaves the earth in the Rapture... the Holy Spirit will be taken out of the way... in the sense that His unique lawlessness-restraining ministry... through God's people will be removed.

In spite of its weakness and seeming failure... never underestimate the importance of the church in the world. ... People who criticize the church... do not realize that the presence of the people of God in this world... restrains lawlessness... that would otherwise run rampant. Government and Laws are not nearly as significant for restraining evil... as the presence of the church is.

The Restrainer prevents the work of sin from its culmination in the Antichrist... until it is God's time for it to occur. ... **God** is running the show and is in control of events.

This is good theology! It is a doctrine to meditate on when we wonder if God is aware of the personal hardship we may be going through. Yes... He is aware... and He has set His limits. ... He is in full control and He has a certain time-table. Evil does not win. It does not get away with it. We do not need to go down the road of thinking... "Why not give up the faith...?" Evil only seems to be winning in the here and now. But we still have an eternity to come.

2 Thessalonians 2:8

The point is... Jesus will destroy the AntiChrist with overwhelming ease! This powerful person will be destroyed by the mere **breath of the Lord**

Jesus. Antichrist may control mankind, but he will be no match for Messiah. Jesus is Lord indeed. “The very breathing of the glorified Jesus will slay the lawless one like the blast of a fiery furnace”

AntiChrist's will have his "Waterloo." ... He will be finished and done. His plug will be pulled.... He will be nothing after the Lord gets done with Him.

This will be true... even though everything will seem like he has won. ... But he hasn't... and he won't.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12

His miracles are not the only thing that will deceive people into thinking he has divine power. Everything he does will mislead people... especially those whose minds are blinded to the truth of who he is... and what he is doing... because they refuse to love the truth.

Our response to the gospel must be a matter of the heart (love)... rather than simply of the head. ... It is not simply a matter of agreeing... with our intellect. ... The rejecters did not love the truth of God.

It is important to note that these people **did** have opportunity to believe and be saved. Verse 10... they refused to love the truth... They rejected it. THEREFORE (verse 11) God sends them a strong delusion... and ultimately condemns them.

Paul's message to the Thessalonians has much application for us today. Ask God to teach you how to live... in the time... in which we are currently living. ... We have seen that we are much closer to the events described by the term "Day of the Lord"... than the vantage point from which Paul wrote this letter. I believe we are at least VERY close to... if not already in... the distinctive "aspostasia" (departure from the truths of God.) I see so many similarities to the church age we are in... to the church age that is described in Revelation 3:14-22... that will be the last church age before the day of the Lord. It is depicted as being lukewarm... and a people ruled church – not Christ ruled. What the PEOPLE want is most important. It is run as a democracy... unlike the church of any other age. ... In fact Jesus Christ is described as being on the outside of the church... knocking on the door... asking to come in. The church has pushed Him out... in order to accomplish the people's agenda.

Paul wrote because the Thessalonians were unnecessarily shaken. ... I often think that perhaps the church of our day SHOULD be shaken... not because we missed the rapture... but because it could happen at any moment!

We know what is happening... and we know what is going to happen. God has set His plan of the ages in motion. ... It is a plan of redemption for all who will place their faith in Jesus Christ... to love the truth... and be saved.

We must hold the doctrine of Christ's return... in high enough regard... that it effects our behavior... No... let me say it stronger... our own character. Ask God to open your heart and your eyes and get rid of this idea that

doctrine of the end times should be disregarded. ... No! It is to effect who we are and the way we live... right now!

Ask God to bring an end to your trying to be safe and comfortable. Ask Him to give you the courage to share the good news about His plan of the ages. Offer to others... the truth... for them to love.

Whenever we speak of the end times, our hearts often quicken... partly out of joy... yet also out of fear. ... To speak of end times is to speak of somewhat uncertain times. "No one knows about that day or hour," Christ says... "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son." ... But the uncertainty of calendars and dates... isn't what out to trouble us the most. What it should be... is... what am I doing with the certainty that I do have...?