

The Great Delusion

⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,

¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,

¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace,

¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

2 Thessalonians 2:9-17

Modern Delusions

DELUSION. This is a sad, **sad word**. In 1828, Noah Webster defined it as “**a misleading of the mind,**” and “**illusions ...**”

proceeding from false views.” He added that, “We are all liable to the delusions of [tricks or frauds].” This makes a sad word scary. We are living in days of unprecedented delusion and because of it, a civilization is toppling like a giant who has had too much to drink. But even worse than a nation are all of those individuals caught in the web of the Trickster, individuals who are perishing.

In the world I grew up in, actually in the world my youngest daughter now only 8 was born into, it would not have seemed possible that a man who won the Olympic Decathlon could later be named *Woman of the Year*. In the same way, you would think that feminists, who stand up for the rights of women, would be infuriated by the ever-increasing foray of boys who think they are girls joining female individual sports competitions and absolutely dominating them. Or you would think that they would boycott and protest any store that lets delusional men go into women’s bathrooms. But they don’t. In fact, it is the opposite. They celebrate it even though all it does it harm both these men and these very women. It is a form of self-cannibalism, eating oneself to death.

Forty-six years ago, [a case made it to the Supreme Court](#) that changed the moral face of a nation. This case allowed doctors to burn, torture, dismember, and decapitate fetuses in a mother's womb. Back then, the argument was that this was not a person. And so, [abortion](#) became the law of the land. Today, with what can only be described as breakneck speed, and this really only started in earnest *a month ago*, several states are vying for the honor of which one can have the most radical legislation making any and every form of infanticide outside of the womb legalized. The most helpless and precious among us are being brutally slaughtered in a holocaust that now runs somewhere near 60,000,000 people who will never see the light of day. [You would think](#) that those who demand that we protect the rights of whales and owls and creatures in unhatched eggs and those wanting to help people cross our borders would be the first to stand in line to help these infants, because they know they are humans! But many are actually the first to cheer and celebrate these reprehensible murders.

These can only be called [delusions](#) of the most serious kind of moral disorder. But sadly, we could spend the entire day only talking about more and more of these. Left to

themselves, they do not know an end. It is difficult for morally rational people to understand how a mind can become so desensitized, so off-kilter to basic truth that they not only endorse what is wicked, but positively celebrate and demand the increase of the very activities that bring about their own demise.

The passage today overlaps with that **confusing, lengthy discussion** Paul gives about the **Antichrist**. I'm returning to a few verses we looked at last time for a couple of reasons. First, I was not able to give them their proper due with so many other things to look at. Second, these verses are directly related to those that follow both **linguistically** (with connecting words and phrases such as “but” and “so then”) and **structurally** through a chiasm.

- A. The coming **lawless one** by **Satan** with **false signs and wonders** (9)
- B. **All wicked deception** (10)
- C. for **those who are perishing** because they refused to believe the truth and be saved (10)
- D. **God sends them a delusion** (11) **That they may believe what is false** (11b)
- E. In order that all may be condemned who **did not believe the truth** but had pleasure in unrighteousness (12)
- F. **We ought always to give thanks to God for you** (13a)
- E1. Beloved of the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved through sanctification by the spirit and **belief in the truth** (13b)
- D1. **God called you through our gospel that you may obtain the glory of Christ** (14)
- C1. Stand firm **brothers** (15)
- B1. **Hold to the traditions** (15)
- A1. vs. **the Apostles** who came **from God** with **teaching** (spoken or a letter) (15)

This particular chiasm is more important than many because of how **it contrasts deep deception** with the only thing that can save you from it. But not only does it contrast it, **it explains it**. What it says is actually proof of its veracity (truthfulness), because the way the Apostle speaks here makes many people angry while others it gives great comfort. The anger in turn *can* (not always though) demonstrate the power of deception, such that even the very word of God is hated simply because it is true.

Context

As we begin, it needs to be said up front, again, that **the context** is of the “**coming of the lawless one**” (2Th 2:9). We saw last time that this refers to some kind of an end-time figure, almost certainly a person. Yet, this person is typed throughout history. Paul drew from the king of Tyre (Ezek 28), the Assyrian (Isa 11), a Greek (Dan 11), and a Roman (Matt 24). Each of these figures are **types of the coming Antichrist** who seems from this very verse to be someone that has yet to come.

The reason why is because it says that he will come “**with all power and false signs and wonders**” (2Th 2:9).

Leon Morris explains that, “All three of these words are used of the miracles of Christ. They are probably used here for that reason . . . The first term points to the supernatural force that actuates the miracles . . . The second indicates their character as “signs” directing attention to something beyond themselves. The third, “wonders,” reminds us that miracles are inexplicable for ordinary people.”¹ This is one reason why, though the term is not used here, this man is said to be “Antichrist.”

Now, there were reports surrounding the events of the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. that very strange signs were taking place. **Cassius Dio** said that it rained blood in Italy such that rivers of blood flowed throughout the land. **Suetonius** said that a thunderbolt struck the temple of the Caesars, decapitating all the statues and dashing Augustus’ scepter from his hands. **Tacitus** said that an apparition of superhuman size suddenly emerged from the Chapel of Juno.² While Preterists have some reasons here to add to their view

¹ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 232.

² **Tacitus** *The Histories* 4.81. **Suetonius**, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* 10.7. In Suetonius’ account *Vespasian heals a lame man*. Cited at “2 Thessalonians 2:1-12: a Preterist Commentary—The Man of Lawlessness Revealed,” *Preterist Bible Commentary*, <https://revelationrevolution.org/2-thessalonians-2-1-9-a-preterist-commentary-the-man-of-lawlessness-revealed/#easy-footnote-bottom-33-47>.

that this text is thus fulfilled, even taking these at face value and believing them, it is clear that neither Nero nor Titus nor any other candidate for the Man of Sin was the one performing these, nor does it make a lot of sense that this man was deceiving people into thinking that he was God in human flesh, especially not the Jews, but even the Romans themselves. Yet, that's what it seems the coming of this man does. This is one more reason to see that even these signs and wonders were but types of something greater to come.³

I want to make this point because though the context is about the coming of the Antichrist, you can still have **partial-fulfillments** of all that is mentioned here going on *in our present times*. That doesn't mean that what is happening in the present *is* the final manifestation of these things any more than the 70 A.D. war was. And I think we need to be extremely careful looking around us and concluding that we are living in the days of the very End (especially given that

³ It was pleasing to me to read this at the Preterist site mentioned in the previous note as it demonstrates that even with so-called "full Preterism" there are some who do hold out that the future may also be contained in these prophecies. "**THERE ARE TWO TYPES OF PRETERISM: FULL PRETERISM AND PARTIAL PRETERISM. Full Preterism** is the belief that all end time prophecies have been fulfilled. **Partial Preterism** is the belief that some end time prophecies have been fulfilled. Most Biblical scholars are partial preterists to varying degrees. Though the following commentary will show that all end time prophecies have been fulfilled, *this is not evidence against the partial preterist view. Perhaps the first century events that fulfilled all end time prophecies were types or shadows pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of these predictions again in the distant future*" [italics added].

not all peoples have had the gospel given to them). It does mean that it is legitimate to make present applications even though the final terrible end has not yet come. When delusions come, we have no reason to believe that what is said here about the end delusion come any differently. In fact, because Paul is making this very application to these people at a time (see esp. **vs. 13**) that was not The End, it proves this. That is how the context needs to be used as we proceed.

Deception and Delusion

What? (Deception-Satan; Delusion-God)

Having opened with thinking about **delusions**, I want to turn to thinking about **the “what”** that takes place in the **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**. It tells us that “**the lawless one is coming ... with all power and false signs and wonders**” and **with something else** attached to them. That something is “**all wicked deception**” (**10**). The Greek word “**deception**” (*ap- atē*) is translated by the ESV only as “deception” or “deceit.” The word means variously “**deception,**” “**deceitful,**” (BDAG), “**to mislead, to deceive**” (Louw-Nida), “**trick,**

fraud, wiles” (LSJ), “to lead astray, wandering, delusion, error” (NIDNTT). Notice how close this is to Webster’s definition of “delusion” as a “misleading of the mind” and “illusions proceeding from false views?”

In other words, the purpose of these false signs and wonders that come in such great power are to trick people, to mislead them, to misdirect them, to lead them astray. Notice that adjective that accompanies this noun. It is “wicked” (*adikia*). There is deliberate intent behind these miracles. It is blasphemous for it seeks to counterfeit the Lord Jesus. It is a morally perverse, dreadful, evil intent.

By Whom? (Satan, God)

Next, it tells us who is really behind them. Though they accompany the Antichrist, Paul says this “is by the activity of Satan” (9). This refers to the Evil One, the fellow in the Garden who so cleverly yet wickedly sought the demise of our race. This is our ancient foe who seeks to work us woe. He is the invisible power behind the Antichrist who seeks to counterfeit Christ with the intent of destroying through deception. That is, by creating false signs and wonders with

great power, he will lead many people astray to worship and follow him.

To Whom (“those who are perishing”)

This leads us to **who these signs are directed towards**. It says they are **“for those who are perishing”** (10). This is very important. Those who are perishing are any and all who do not bow their knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan deliberately attacks these people with intent to kill them eternally. And he does this through cloak and dagger, invisibility and power. The way he works is insidious. And there are few who can begin to imagine the power he wields over unbelievers. This is partly because that power begins with deception, and when a person is deceived, they do not know it, are not aware of it, and do not care, because they do not believe it is true. Try telling Bruce Jenner that he is a man. It simply won't work. He is deceived.

Why? (Because... Because)

The next point is even more vital. It explains **why those who are perishing are perishing**. It says, **“Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved”** (10). In other words,

they wanted to hate truth and they wanted to perish in their sins. This was their will. This was their heart.

The “truth” here leads to being “saved.” This clearly refers to eternal life, because salvation is contrasted here and elsewhere in this letter with “perishing” and “eternal destruction” (1:9). Therefore, the “truth” has to refer to that knowledge which can save a person. And so Hendriksen writes, “But what is meant by the expression ‘the love for the truth’? We answer as follows: When the Gospel is proclaimed, the hearers are urged to accept *Christ and all his benefits*.”⁴

Since this is true, what does it mean when you sit and listen to a sermon that clearly presents the Gospel that Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a perfect life according to the law, died a sacrificial death on your behalf so that you might be saved, was raised to life to vindicate him before the world, ascended to heaven to become enthroned over every power and authority, and will return against to judge the living and the dead? What does it mean for you when I tell you that Jesus did not do this merely for his sake, but also for yours

⁴ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, vol. 3, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 185.

so that you might taste the benefits, know Truth, come out of darkness, and see the Light?

It means that standing there before your eyes is a line of demarcation. If you choose to **sit there, unresponsive**, unmoved, in refusal of believing that what you hear is truth, then know that this makes you **a prime target** of the wicked deception of the enemy. Know that because you refuse to love the truth and so be saved, that by the activity of Satan he will come in deceit by a putting you under a spell that you do not even realize has hypnotized you to evil. Thus, you will be carried away to your own eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord, forever. For it is not merely the people of the world that are in mind here as **“those who are perishing,”** it is those who have had the Gospel given to them and they wanted nothing do to with it.

However, there is more. Satan is not the only person involved in this. God considers his Word so precious that he will not throw it to the dogs. He will not have it trampled upon by the enemy. **“Therefore,”** vs. 11 continue, **“God...”** **God enters the picture** now and the context is still **“those who are perishing.”**

“Therefore God sends them a strong delusion.” The word “delusion” (*planē*) here is a virtual synonym with the word “deception.” Some of the lexicons have the exact same entry. In other words, the meaning is identical: “delusion,” “wandering,” “error,” “deceit,” “to mislead,” “to cause to be mistaken.” The astonishing thing is that it now says “God” does this. God sends this delusion.

This is the beginning of where I said some people get angry at the Bible for what it teaches. “God would never do such a thing! He is a God of love! This kind of an action is purely done from hate. This is not true.” Sometimes people just don’t like what it says, and there’s nothing that we can do about that. However, sometimes it is that people have the wrong understanding of what it says. Let me try to correct a couple potential misunderstandings.

First, this is classic language straight out of the OT where the same exact event is said to have two different causes. For example, Joseph said to his brothers of all the horrible events that had happened to him, including being thrown into a well and left for dead, sold into slavery in Egypt, and sent to jail and left to rot there, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring

it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen 50:20). Notice the two agents do not have the same motives. The brothers meant it for “evil.” God, however, in the very same set of circumstances, meant it for “good.”

The second point is that God is not doing anything apart from the will of those who are perishing. This point is not made once, but twice. We’ve seen how “they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” This is their fault. In vs. 12 it says they “did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” The deception is that they will continue in this unrighteousness and they will not only continue to love it but will now think that it is actually “good.” So, there is nothing “unfair” here at all. God gives people exactly what they want! What could be more fair than that?

But notice, he does this, “So that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (11-12). This reveals God’s motives. Remember, Satan’s motives were said to be “with all wicked deception.” God’s are not so. Instead, he wants these people to believe what is false so that by their own rope, from their own freewill to do evil,

they may all be condemned. Each man will die for his own sins. The motive is justice.

What is so heinously frightening about a delusion or a deception is that **you never know you are under it**. You think everything is fine. If anything, you believe everyone else is crazy. This is exactly what we are seeing in our world right now. It is a giving over to mass and massive delusions. The things we are seeing unfold before our very eyes do not seem possible and yet they are. It is a world gone absolutely mad, and yet those bewitched think that those who disagree with them are the mad ones because they believe in absolutes, in truth, in right and wrong. Friends, there is no way, by yourself, that you can get out from under this if you are in it. You are not capable of it for this reason. You do not want to be free of it. You like it. And you have been given over.

The Center

If this was the end of our passage (as it was last week), this would be absolutely devastating hopelessness. However, the next verse leads us to **the center of the chiasm**. It says, **“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you,**

brothers” (2Th 2:13). We have seen this exact thing before, twice in these two letters. Both times this is how the Apostle begins the letter. “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers” (2Th 1:3). The Greek is virtually identical, as we see from the ESV’s exact same translation. We find the exact same thing in the first letter, “We give thanks to God always for all of you” (1Th 1:2).

Now, in both of these places, the reason for the thanksgiving is because God has done something. In 2 Thessalonians, God has given them faith and justified them. In 1 Thessalonians, God has chosen them, given them the gospel, and saved them. These are wholly the works of God and not man, otherwise there would be no point in thanking God. If this was their work, their doing, then he should thank them.

This is the reason why the passage today has this as its center. It is the hinge, the pivot, the thing upon which everything else turns. In the first half, it was God giving those who are perishing over to their own desires. But now, God is doing something else for someone else. What he is doing is seen as the exact reversal of the previous text. It is the solution, the answer to the problem. And this, too, is why this is the center. Because if God does not do something, as we

have seen, nothing will be done. You will continue happily along the road to hell. And, as we have seen earlier, there are things here that some people really do not like, which is a frightening thing, given what we have just seen this means God is doing.

To Whom (“those who are perishing”)

The first question that naturally arises from this part of the passage is **to whom is he giving thanks?** While we’ve just seen that he has called them “brother,” he gets more specific. “**Beloved of the Lord**” (2Th 2:13). This language is important, for in its OT context, it reveals something. In **Deuteronomy 7:7** we read, “**It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you...**”

Here we learn that God did something. He **set his love upon Israel**. It tells us why and it has nothing to do with their being outstanding or remarkable in any sense. God simply wanted to do it. So he did.

Now, this word “**beloved**” has a host of things swilling around it. I’ll give you two. **First**, this is the word used of Christ himself, the Beloved Son of God. So, the love of God

here is the same kind of love the Father has for the Son. How special and wonderful and impossible to plum to the depths of trying to understand the meaning of his love for these people. **Second**, the idea here is intimately related to God “**knowing**” a person before they are born. As Dr. Boice argues, this “knowing” is the OT equivalent of the NT’s “**foreknown.**” “**Those whom God foreknew...**” (**Rom 8:29**).⁵

This is understood better in **Amos 3:2**. Where the ESV reads, “**You only have I known of all the families of the earth,**” the NAS says, “**You only have I chosen...**” This leads us to consider the “why” of this part of our passage. Why or to what end is this love?

Why? (Because... Because)

The next word in Deuteronomy is that he “**... set his love on you and chose you ...**” This is what I mean when I say that Amos and Deuteronomy can help us understand what Paul is talking about here. The word translated as “**known**” or “**chosen**” is here attached theologically to God **choosing**

⁵ **James Montgomery Boice**, *Romans: The Reign of Grace*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 921.

and loving Israel. And how does this help with Thessalonians? Because, like 1 Thessalonians, where the thanksgiving is for God's electing love, we read now, "... brothers be-loved by the Lord, because God chose you..." (2Th 2:13).

So we are moving into the "why" of the second half of the passage. In the first half, the delusion and deception happened in order to condemn people who would not believe the truth and be saved. Now, the opposite occurs. God's love of them results in his "choosing" them. This is the doctrine of election. Just here we need to compare Deuteronomy with Thessalonians.

In Deuteronomy, the choosing is very specific. "God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Dt 7:6). This has to do with the national entity, though it was because of his special love for the individuals Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Apostle puts it, "To them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever" (Rom 9:4-5). In other words, what they were chosen for was for God's glorious

plan of salvation to come through them. This choosing was **not to salvation**, though he did choose many for this end as well. But nations do not “get saved.” Individuals do. This is where we want to contrast Deuteronomy with Thessalonians.

The verse says, “**God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved**.” Firstfruits is simply the first of the harvest. That is, they were one of the earliest peoples to be reached with the gospel outside of Israel. And many responded favorably for this reason: God chose them to be saved.

Notice how the word “saved” is in this verse and in **vs. 10**. Earlier it had said, “**They refuse to love the truth and so be saved**.” This is now contrasted with, “**God chose you to be saved**.” So, one group hates God and his Word, refuses the gospel, rejects truth, and will not come to Christ for salvation. **You might think** that the opposite of this would be that the other group loves God and his Word, is excited about the Gospel, believes the truth, and comes to Christ for salvation. But that is not yet what it says. It says the opposite is that *God chose them to be saved*.

Why would this be? Many either do not understand it or simply reject the reason out-of-hand. For instance, a professor at a local seminary writes about our verse on the Society of Evangelical Arminians blog. After acknowledging that OT election was corporate and not to salvation, a one-to-one correspondence is then superimposed onto **2Th 2:13**. He then asks, “The key question remains, however: how does one become a part of the chosen people?” One would think the answer is, “You are ... chosen.” But no.

He says, “Concerning Israel, being born of Jewish parents established one as part of the chosen people.” Well, yes, it *established* them in their election. But the fact that they were born to Jewish parents rather than, say Chinese or Mexican or Irish parents is because that was God’s *choice*. Being born didn’t make them chosen; being chosen made them be born. You would think this would be obvious, but when you are fighting against the doctrine, it most certainly isn’t. That’s the power of deception.

He then says, “In the Christian era being born again (or born of the Spirit) adds a person to the church, the elect body of Christ. To be born again requires faith. To trust in Christ

puts one into the corporate Christ, his elect body.”⁶ This is all true. The problem is, **this is not what the text is saying**. It isn’t saying that election here is “to a corporate body.” It says, “**God chose you ... to be saved.**” To answer the question “How does one become part of the chosen people” is that **God first chooses you for salvation!**⁷ I do not know how much clearer it could be. Yet, this same man has an entire book devoted to proving that the Bible never in even a single place says that God chooses people to salvation.

One of the things that **can trip people up** over this doctrine seems to be something that this professor is also getting tripped up on. He talks about the need for faith and being justified. Sometimes, people hear those of us who say we believe in unconditional election and think that by it we mean that justification and faith are irrelevant. Yes, there have been a few hyper-Calvinists who have taught this, but the

⁶ **William W. Klein**, “Is Corporate Election Merely Virtual Election?: A Case Study in Contextualization,” *Society of Evangelical Arminians* (Mar 29, 2013), <http://evangelicalarminians.org/william-w-klein-is-corporate-election-merely-virtual-election/>.

⁷ On the same site, another Arminian tries to go after the grammar to somehow prove that it does not teach unconditional election (that is, election not based on foreseen faith), but conditional election. The problem here, as with all Arminianism, is that it assumes some people want to choose God quite apart from his grace. In other words, there is a theological presupposition that is not found in this text or anywhere else which is imported to make things say something that, if the presupposition is not true, is impossible. See **Brian Abasciano**, “2 Thessalonians 2:13, Greek Grammar, and Conditional Election,” (Mar 2, 2013), <http://evangelicalarminians.org/2-thessalonians-213-greek-grammar-and-conditional-election/>.

vast majority of the Reformed in all ages have always said that election to salvation is only appropriated through faith and being justified. Which is exactly what the professor said a moment ago. Yes, this **brings you into the corporate body of Christ**. And there is a sense, I suppose, in which you could talk about this being corporate election.

But **the reason why a person believes** and trusts and is justified is because God chose them to be saved. If God doesn't do that, then you belong to the first group in our text, not the second. And you won't care one little wit about any of this, because you will be totally deceived.

Therefore, notice what he says in this light. “**God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**” (13). In other words, his choosing love **causes him** to bring his election through the sanctification moment and process. It **compels him** to send his Spirit to do this in them. It is not their work, but his. And this is what brings them to believe the truth, unlike those who are perishing who refused to love the truth and did not believe the truth. This is the contrast, and it is quite deliberate.

He continues in the next verse by basically repeating what he has just said. “**To this he called you through our**

gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (14). We’ve seen the **effectual calling** throughout these two letters (1Th 2:12; 5:24; 2Th 1:11). It is the thing that we saw was parallel with being justified by faith in the first chapter. And without God doing this work, there is no obtaining any glory and there is no reason to thank God for anything. At least, not in this absolute way. He might have said, “**We thank God that he gave you a chance, and we are so thankful to you that you took it!**” But that isn’t what he said. If you have trouble with this doctrine, please realize that it is given in order to empty you of your self-importance and to remove perhaps the most foundational delusion of all—that you are a basically good person who came to God on your own. That is not true, and you rob God of his glory in our Lord Jesus Christ when you think such things. You lift yourself up to a position you do not actually hold, giving yourself a power that you do not actually have.

By Whom? (Satan, God)

I might linger here longer, but let me finish this thought by now contrasting explicitly what I’ve said many times already. In the first half, there was a person responsible for the

wicked deception. That person was **Satan**. God was also involved, but only in as much as he was giving them exactly what they want and letting Satan deceive them as he wished.

Here, the contrast, just to be absolutely clear, is **God**. We thank “God” for you. “**God chose you ... to be saved.**” It is God’s doing that brings this about. The contrast is not because Satan and you, as if you have some power to overcome his wicked deceptions. No, we’ve seen that the whole point of a deception is that you do not even realize you are being deceived. Therefore, you cannot possibly have any power over him. And even if you could, do you not realize that he is the highest of all created beings, who has been around since the foundation of the world. Do you really think you have power over this creature? No. This glory belongs to God and God alone. This is why you are to be thankful.

What? (deception, Satan; delusion, God)

As we come to the end of the chiasm, I now want to point out **what it is** that is being contrasted in order to make one more difficult subject a little easier to think about. Previously, we saw that the coming of the man of lawlessness is with “**all power and false signs and wonders.**” It is in the

looking at these signs, the being lured away by the wonders that people are then taken into the deception. They trust in signs and wonders. That is the “what.” So what is the contrast here?

It is something very unexpected, unless you understand the ways of God. Rather than being deceived, the Apostle tells them, “**So then, brothers, stand firm**” (2Th 2:15). The opposite of **wandering** and roaming that comes with the delusion is to **stand firm**, to not be moved, to stand on the Rock and solid ground. So how does a person stand firm?

“**Hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter**” (15). This one is rather shocking, and for several reasons. **First**, we live in a culture that has almost abandoned every religious tradition ever. We have rebelled against tradition like perhaps no other generation in any other place at any other time in the history of mankind. And that’s a long, long time.

Second, many Protestants have come to think of all tradition as a bad word. This comes in part because there are many bad traditions, in another part because the Reformers were always harping on the traditions of Rome, in another

part because our Lord Jesus had some things to say about tradition that were not good, and in another part because when we think of anyone holding traditions in the Bible, most of us think of the Pharisees, and they were not good.

The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?” (Matt 15:2). In other words, they held tradition in high esteem. This was brought home to the Gentile world in the musical Fiddler on the Roof when Tevye sings, “Tradition!” The whole movie is based on Papas traditions!

Jesus turned around and said to them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition ... for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God” (3, 6). People hear this and put it into their own context and conclude that all traditions are bad. This is the reason why you can go to virtually any Evangelical church these days and get literally zero by way of anything smacking of something that is older than 15 years. From the order of service to the newness of the interior, everything has to scream, “You will find no tradition here!” It is so bad out there that someone told me not too long ago that our church is a cult and the only reason she gave was because of

our liturgy. We read prayers together and confess our sins and don't have an hour and a half of rock music where we hand out ear-plugs. To her, that is what church is. Yet, she has no idea that until only just the last couple of decades, basically every Evangelical church in America worshipped in a way that is far more similar to what we do than what they do today.

So Paul tells them **to hold to the traditions**. Not to “tradition” (singular). Not to “traditions” general. But to “the traditions.” How can he do this? What does he mean by it? Essentially, “the traditions” are the things that the Apostles received directly from the Lord Jesus. In Paul's case, he received them via visions. In **1Co 11:23** he says, “**I have received [the tradition] from the Lord**” (cf. **1Co 11:2** for the word “traditions” in this context). In this way, “tradition” and “Lord” are actually **synonyms**.⁸ By it, he refers to **the ethical and theological teachings of Jesus Christ** in the flesh.

Therefore, by it he does not mean any old tradition that someone gives you just because it is old. Even in the early church there were traditions that grew up fairly quickly that

⁸ See **Oscar Cullmann**, “*Kyrios* as Designation for the Oral Tradition Concerning Jesus.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 3 (1950): 180–197.

have no hint of coming from Jesus, and since we have everything we need from Jesus' teachings in the Scripture, extra traditions supposedly coming from him cannot bind the conscience. But those teachings that do come from him must bind our conscience, for he is the Lord God himself. In the context here, this means especially the traditions concerning the Second Coming and ethical living in light of it (2Th 3).

Therefore, the word is not a bad word at all. In fact, it is through the traditions that we keep from wandering into delusion. It is [holding fast to the traditions that is here the antithesis of being led astray by signs and wonders](#). Isn't it interesting that whenever signs and wonders these days are promoted by various sects and cults, the traditions of Jesus through the Apostles are usually very far away? These things are a prime way that God keeps the delusion at bay among his elect.

You have to remember that in this culture, especially with Jesus and all the Apostles (especially Paul), they knew how to pass down tradition. That's what they did as Jews! And since we are talking here about only one generation of people (rather than an entire organization called the Roman Church), these traditions would not have been corrupted.

He says they passed them down through either personal contact (“by our spoken word”) or through direct writing (“by our letter”). And since these are his only two options available, this is a strong proof-text for the vital importance of Scripture Alone being our guiding principle when evaluating traditions today—any traditions. We have what we need.

Benediction

With this being his **final word** on the matter of **Coming of Christ** and his having just wrapped up the encouraging comparison of God’s people and how they can and will remain God’s people because of election and the means God gives to bring its purposes to a reality in time and space, with the center of it being thanksgiving, it is natural that he should conclude his thoughts with **a benediction**. It is the same thing he did in in the middle of the first letter (**1Th 3:12-13**). It is the same thing he does at the end of his great treatise on doctrine at the end of Romans 11 (**vv. 33**). So also here.

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good

hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word” (2Th 2:16-17). What is the focus? **Comfort**. He says it twice. Comfort comes because **God loved us** and this love is rooted in his electing purposes in eternity past. This love is proven through the eternal life that we inherit by grace. This comfort is **sealed with the hope** that what is eternal can begin even now to any and all who trust in Christ. This comfort helps when they finally understand they have not missed the Day of the LORD. He has not come back yet. But he is coming and when he does, he will destroy the works of the Evil One. Therefore, this first great comfort of the Christian comes through sound theology and doctrine on all these matters. Hence, the vital importance of holding fast to the traditions.

Second, this comfort establishes our heart. It helps your love for God grow warm like his love for you. This love comforts you because when you begin to be filled with love, you are not an empty deceived person wandering around in error and self-delusion as you see the world around you walk. Rather, you are full of truth and hope, can see things clearly, and life becomes full rather than empty. You be-

come warm-hearted rather than full of resentment, bitterness, anger, and complaining. This in turn affects the way you live. And thus through the heart warmed cheerful by God's love, he establishes in you every good work and word, thus giving you the things you were destined for as those chosen by Christ. In other words, he gives all that he commands. He ensures that it will happen from calling to glory and everything in between.

This is why it is a benediction. Its focus is, like the thanksgiving in vs. 13, not upon you, but upon him. “**Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father**” give you these things. He has sworn that he will. He has proven his love to them and to all you today who love Christ. As Paul prayed for them, so I also do for you. May God be pleased to do it all that we may not fall into these deceptions, but rather be established in hope, comfort, and love.

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