

Loving What Is True

2 Thessalonians 2:5-12

How many people here this morning like food?

Me too!

Food is an incredibly significant part in the first few chapters of God's word.

On the third day of creation the bible says, "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.'"

A few days later on the sixth day when the LORD created human beings He said to them "*Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.*"

God designed us to eat.

God made us to need stuff and one of the things He made us to need is food.

One of the many things that is interesting about food is that while it is a necessity it is also something that can be enjoyed.

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to have no sense of taste whatsoever?

Kids, can you imagine if cake and broccoli tasted the exact same?

Imagine if we had no sense of texture.

Imagine a perfectly cooked steak and a bowl of oatmeal being perceived as exact same thing in your mouth.

I can hardly wrap my mind around what that would be like.

I for one am glad that the LORD made us the way He did when it comes to food.

It is one thing among many things that show us that we are needy creatures which is constantly pointing us to our greatest need which is the LORD Himself.

It also shows us that what we need can also be enjoyed.

That, I believe, is why the Bible compares God's word to food in a number of places.

The bible is compared to bread implying its necessity to life.

God's word is also compared to honey, implying both necessity and delight.

This is one of the great works of the Holy Spirit.

He gives those in Christ a delight in the LORD and in the truth of His Word.

[That delight is essential to the Christian life and we can see that in our text for this morning **2 Thessalonians 2:5-12**. The main focus of this passage is to show us the importance of loving what is true. In a day and age when lies and false philosophy abound, we would do well to give our careful attention to what is written here. In these verses the apostle continues his teaching

on the coming of the LORD Jesus and the church being gathered to Him. His goal is to keep them from being deceived by people who were trying to convince them that they had missed it. Instead of falling for the lie Paul wants them and us to stick to what is true. Towards that end he reminds them of something in verse five which points us to this first lesson from this passage which is that...]

Point #1 – Holding firmly to what is true prevents deception. (Verse 5)

Having what is right in our minds is good, but we need more than information we need to actually trust what God's says and when we do that we have a powerful defense against lies.

Let's look together at verse 5.

Paul brings these believers back to when he was first with them and taught them the gospel.

Multiple commentators think it is important that Paul writes in the first person singular here.

Often in these letters he speaks to them in the first person plural including Silas and Timothy in the gospel work done in the city.

The fact that he says 'I' here instead of 'we' probably means that he has a clear memory of teaching 'these things' himself to the Thessalonian church.

It probably further suggests that this teaching was much more significant than a casual reference in a sermon or two, but that he had taken some care to ensure that they had the information they needed in order to think properly about Jesus' return.

So the appearance of 'the man of lawlessness' and his complete opposition to Christ is something they knew about because Paul had clearly explained it to them.

So if they already knew, how did they become 'shaken in [their] mind' about Jesus' return when what Paul taught them originally should have been sufficient to keep them safe from that error?

There is only one answer that makes sense and it is one that should be of great concern to us because the same thing can easily happen to us.

You see the problem here is something much deeper than missing information.

If this were a matter of mere ignorance that could be easily corrected by providing the Thessalonians with the knowledge they were missing.

The problem here however is that though they had the truth their trust in the truth had been shaken.

[That is one of the big factors in the fall of humanity all the way back in the Garden of Eden. Remember what the devil said to Eve? He said, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" What did Eve do? She quoted back the rule about not eating from the

tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Then what did the devil do? He said, “You will not surely die...” And it went really badly from there. Listen, knowledge is not the problem there, the problem is Adam failing to trust what God had said.]

To say that there have been a great number of false teachings in the history of the church is an enormous understatement.

I tried to think of a serious false teaching in the history of the church that was not a denial of something clearly taught in the Bible.

I could not think of a single one.

I tried to think of a single time where I have had conversations with people in serious theological error or neck deep in sin where the main problem was being unaware of what the Bible has to say on such things.

There were a few but even in those instances the apparent ignorance of truth was small in comparison to refusing to believe the truth that was set before them.

Most often brothers and sisters we are pulled into a lie because truth fails to be converted from mere information into a trusted conviction.

[As a pastor I really want those who gather here week in and week out to know true things about the LORD and His Word but we need more than information in our minds. The devil has that in abundance. We need more than that, we also need to love what is true because if we love and trust what is true we will never fall for a lie. You might be asking, ‘Why should I trust what God says?’ That is a good question and verses 6-8 give us a powerful reason to trust the truth of God’s word. You see...]

Point #2 – Truth will prevail in the end on account of God’s power. (Verses 6-8)

While evil may at times appear to have the upper hand, the LORD will have His Way and even His most powerful enemies will come to nothing.

Paul again points these believers to what they already know (Verses 6-7).

The ‘him’ in verse six that is being restrained is ‘the man of lawlessness’.

It would seem that the kingdom of darkness would like to bring the antichrist on the scene immediately, but that ‘something’ is keeping him back.

Before I read the commentaries on this I thought scholars agreed about ‘what’ is preventing ‘the man of lawlessness’ from coming on the scene until the appointed time.

Turns out there are a variety of ideas about what that may be.

Some think, as I did at first, that this is a reference to the Holy Spirit, some believe he is talking about the Roman Empire, some believe it is the evangelistic efforts of the church, others

think he is speaking about angels being at work in the world, and the list goes on.

I like what Leon Morris writes about this. He says, “*The fact is we don’t know.*”

It is clear the Thessalonians knew because Paul had taught them and since they knew he did not feel the need to clearly name the restraining force in this letter.

I would say two important things about that. First, this is exactly what the Holy Spirit intended for us as He inspired the pen of the Apostle Paul to speak to the church down through the centuries.

We don’t know for sure because God doesn’t want us to know for sure.

Secondly, because we don’t know it is unhelpful to assume and even more unhelpful to build a view of end times on those assumptions.

What we do know is that God is all-knowing and all-powerful which means whatever is being used to restrain the appearing of the antichrist is under God’s control.

These things, like all things, will happen according to God’s plan and in His time.

When that time comes look at what will happen. (**Verse 8**).

Whoa! Here is the human who will oppose the church to the greatest degree in the history of the world throughout the earth and he will be killed or some translations say destroyed by ‘the breath of [Jesus’] mouth’, which is probably a reference to the power of Christ’s word.

In addition to destroying the antichrist, Jesus will bring him to ‘nothing by the appearance of his coming’

The word for ‘coming’ here is the exact same word used in verse 1.

Two things are in view here concerning the coming of Christ. The church being gathered to Jesus and the destruction of the antichrist and every trace of his influence by exercising the power of His Word.

That is a powerful reason to love and trust the truth of the gospel of Christ.

[Jesus brought all things into existence with the breath of His mouth and He will be victorious over His enemies by the breath of His mouth. While it will surely be hard at times to love and trust what is true we must rest in the reality that the LORD will prevail. That raises another important question, “What happens if we don’t?” That question is answered in verses 9-12 where the apostle gives us two lessons that should strike us to the very depths of our souls. These are fearful things that are shared out of love. Let’s look together at verses 9-10 and carefully consider this next lesson. Here is the lesson, that...]

Point #3 – Failing to love the truth puts people under the power of Satan. (Verses 9-10)

Generally speaking the big problem human beings have is affection for what is right rather than evidence or facts and that lack of affection puts people in the hands of the devil.

Verses 9-10 make it very obvious who is behind the power of the antichrist. (Verse 9-10a stop at 'perishing').

John MacArthur believed this is Satan's attempt to imitate the incarnation.

As Christians we rightly believe that Jesus is truly God possessing every divine attribute in infinite perfection.

We also believe that the eternal, uncreated, all-knowing, all-powerful, omnipresent, unchanging, and self-existent person of God the Son became genuinely human in order to live a perfect life, be crucified to pay our debt of sin, and be raised from the dead for the redemption of everyone to trust Him by faith.

The incarnation is the greatest miracle ever done in the history of the world and only God could do such a thing.

The devil though is all about being a counterfeit.

He is all about trying to draw people away from the LORD by trying to get people to think that he can take God's place.

Towards that end the devil empowers the man of lawlessness.

I take the phrase 'with all power' here to mean that Satan gives this lawless man the power to do everything Satan has the power to do.

From what the Bible teaches us that is a significant amount of power in comparison to what we can do as human beings.

In the book of Job he is given permission to affect the weather and afflict Job with illness.

In Exodus we see servants of false religion able to do impressive things.

In the New Testament Peter describes him as a roaring lion seeking to devour people.

We will see that kind of power in the antichrist, but I want you to notice something important here and that is the word 'false'.

He will do things that will appear beyond explanation.

Things that appear to be great signs and wonders but it will all be built on an illusion of power for the purpose of deceiving people.

Satan may be powerful but he is not all-knowing, unchanging, omnipresent, all-powerful, eternal, or self-existent.

And so whatever he will empower the antichrist to do it will not live up to the promise of life and satisfaction that he will offer, but instead it will lead to eternal destruction for those who are deceived.

Why will this happen? (**Verse 10b**)

[Back when I was in high school we had an assembly where a hypnotist came to put on a show. He asked for a volunteer and girl went up to front and he supposedly hypnotized her and got her to act like a chicken. She was running her and there and flapping her arms clucking. I'm no expert, I have no idea if she really thought she was a chicken but I do remember this, the hypnotist said very clearly, "You have to be willing to be put into this trance."]

There is a willful decision here that precedes getting taken in by the lies and false signs and wonders done by the power of Satan.

That decision is refusing to love the truth.

Failing to believe the gospel puts people under the power of the devil.

[We live in a rather ironic time when it comes to the truth of God's word. Hands down we live in a time where the bible is more readily available than at any other time. At the same time knowledge of God's Word and sound doctrine may be at an all-time low. I ask you, "How many people are falling prey to the deception of wickedness as a result?" I shudder to think of the answer and as troubling as it is there is even more to Paul's warning. Not only does rejecting the truth put people under the power of Satan, but...]

Point #4 – Refusing to love the truth leads to being lost to what is false. (Verses 11-12)

We people constantly turn away from what is right it can very easily lead to going deeper and deeper into lies.

Verses 11-12 say things that are hard to hear and can easily be taken the wrong way.

It is very important to remember that Paul is writing these things to these believers out of a deep affection for them.

He is writing these things because he cares about God's people and wants what is best for them.

The purpose of the truth that we are told here remains the same and so I want to encourage you to listen well to what is written here for your good.

Look with me at **verse 11**.

At first glance this sounds like God is doing something unthinkably wrong.

It sounds like God is doing the deceiving and getting them to believe what is false.

It is really important when we come to a passage like this that we apply good bible interpretation principles.

The principle that is important to remember here is context.

Remember verse 6 speaking of the appearance of the man of lawlessness being 'restrained'?

While we don't know exact what is doing the restraining we do know that whatever it is falls under the knowledge and power of God.

Nothing happens in all creation apart from that, which means God is in control of it all.

That being the case then the 'strong delusion' sent by God is the permitting of Satan to work false signs and wonders 'with all wicked deception.'

God is not commanding evil, but giving the command for evil to do what it wants to do.

In other words God is turning people over to their false beliefs.

Why? **Verse 12.**

I saw a video the other day in which someone had a powerful question for an atheist.

He asked, "If Christianity were true would you believe it?"

That is a great question. It is a question that recognizes that trusting in the gospel is about more than facts, figures, and evidence.

There is more than enough facts, figures, and evidence to show the truth of the Christian faith.

But a heart that refuses the truth will not be swayed by facts, figures, or evidence.

If people persist in that God gives them over to it and it leads to condemnation.

You may say, "Wow that sounds harsh, I'm not sure that sounds fair."

I want to ask us all to consider a really important question. Here is the question, "Is the rejection of the gospel a serious offense in our eyes?"

Have you considered the fact that when someone says no to the gospel they are saying, "I don't care that Jesus came to earth to die in the place of sinners."

You are saying to God that the greatest miracle ever is worthless.

You are saying that His holiness is no big deal.

That is just for starters.

Do we think it is a small thing to show contempt for the Son of God?

When people refuse to love the truth that is exactly what they are doing, how then can we possibly think it is unjust or unfair for the LORD to give people over the delusion that they so wanted to embrace?

Listen, if you are someone who is iffy on the gospel I want to plead with you to love what is true.

If you have an ounce of concern for your soul and your eternal destiny turn into that concern rather than away from it.

I have no idea how many opportunities you have left and neither do you.

Don't be lost to the lies of the Devil be saved by loving what is true.

When you love what is true it will keep you from being easily deceived.

When you love what is true it will lead you to life because in the end Christ will prevail.

Instead of being under the power of Satan you will live in the victory of Jesus.

Instead of being lost to what is false you will see God and enjoy Him forever.

Love what is true brothers and sisters and you will be saved.