

The Mystery ó Revealed or Concealed?

Part 1 of 2

(II Thess. 2:1-5)

By Randy Wages

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

I. Introduction:

- A. Turn to 2 Thess. 2.. Today I plan to bring part 1 of a 2 part series in which we will examine this passage, the 2nd chapter of 2 Thessalonians. While today, we will only be considering verses 1-5, I want you to go ahead and look with me at verse 7 which begins with these words, *“For the mystery of iniquity...”* Just as we discovered back when we studied the scriptural description of the “mystery of the gospel,” likewise this “mystery of iniquity” does not speak of that which is mysterious as in beyond comprehension ó but rather it is a mystery for it is something that must be revealed to us.
- B. <Introduce title>: Accordingly, I’ve titled this 2 part study of 2 Thessalonians 2, “The Mystery ó Revealed or Concealed.” It could as well be titled, “enlightened or deceived,” or “saved or lost” for as we’ll glean from these verses, it is speaking of 2 spiritual states ó i.e., at any point in time, everyone in this world either has been “enlightened” by God’s Spirit, (I.e. ó a revelation has taken place in the sense set forth in this passage) or else they remain deceived. As we’ve heard described so often, there are only 2 categories of folks ó sinners & sinners saved by grace ó that is those for whom this deception has been exposed ó to whom the mystery of iniquity has been graciously revealed.
- C. So we have the category of those to whom something has been revealed or who have been enlightened. I.e. ó a mystery previously concealed to us (referred to in vs. 7, “the mystery of iniquity”). It has been revealed to all those whom God the Holy Spirit has given spiritual life and delivered from the deception (the lie) to the belief of the truth (using the language of vs. 13) ó the truth of the Gospel itself ó the gospel that Paul told the Romans was the very power of God unto salvation, for therein something was revealed. And in Romans 1:17 he tells us specifically what is revealed ó that it is the righteousness of God that is revealed.

- D. And then we have the category that describes all others, to whom this mystery remains concealed (those who remain deceived). I.e., they remain in the darkness of unbelief, unbelief of the truth (using the language of vs.12). But it is to have a belief, a faith so to speak, just not the God-given faith wherein this mystery is revealed. As we'll see, to die in that state is to perish as they remain deceived so as to persist in believing the lie that opposes the truth ó unaware of the sin that initially deceives us all ó what is called in vs. 10, the ðdeceivableness of unrighteousness.ö
- E. Dichotomy is setup ó opposites:
1. A Truth that is either Revealed or Concealed
 2. Enlightened or Deceived
 3. Saved or Lost
 4. Believing the truth or believing the lie
 5. Trusting in the good hope of righteousness or in the false hope of unrighteousness.
- F. Keep these opposites in mind, these mutually exclusive descriptions of the saved / the enlightened ones to whom a specific truth has been revealed in sharp contrast to their polar opposites ó the lost / those deceived by Satan's lie who refuse to embrace this specific truth, as we examine these verses pertaining to this subject. What could be more important than what we're considering here? For this pertains to the vital issues of eternal life ó heaven or hell ó set forth in the Gospel, God's way of salvation in sharp contrast to any other way.
- G. So today, we'll be examining this portion of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians on a verse by verse base. Look with me now, at 2 Thess., chapter 2. Beginning in vs. 1 we read:

II. Verse 1: (Read)

- A. Here he is pleading with them concerning the subject of the coming (2nd coming) of Christ when He will gather together all of the öbrethren.ö

III. Verse 2: (Read)

- A. by spirit = by those prophesying as if they had a revelation like that of the apostles, directly from God, the Holy Spirit.
- B. by word = as in the word preached
- C. nor by letter = as if written by us,
- D. ðas that the day of Christ is at handö = (Be turning to I Jn 2)
1. Most commentators believe that this is suggesting that these who would deceive them and so trouble them did so by suggesting either that Christ's return was imminent (perhaps even naming an upcoming day or time). As we know, most in our day who major on the end times typically do so in order to relate a sense of urgency as they know that this life is short.

2. Unfortunately, most do so in an attempt to encourage their listeners to act in accordance with whatever their prescribed religion sets forth as that which the sinner should do in order to save himself, all before its too late, rather than simply communicating God's gospel that would have us to look to Christ alone as the author and finisher of the faith. Instead, their message is that you too can be saved, if you will just believe, or be baptized, or repeat this prayer, or walk this aisle, or invite Jesus into your heart ó whatever their denomination sets forth as the prescribed requirement or condition that the sinner must meet.
3. Some believe that verse 2 indicates that it was being suggested to them that that Christ had already returned. Either may be correct; however in the context, I believe that Paul is simply saying to the brethren of like faith, "Don't allow these who make a profession as you do (i.e. - to be of like, Christian faith) to trouble you as they attempt to deceive and so shake your confidence in the faith. But rather, be prepared for it because we are living even now in the "day of Christ" in which there shall be much deception." The literal Greek translation of this phrase reads, "ó as that is present the day of Christ." Elsewhere in scripture the day of Christ is referred to as the latter days or the last time. That phrase "at hand" can refer to something that is about to happen. But it also may indicate that which is already "present"
4. I Jn 2:18 ff: ***Little children, it is the last time: (in John's day) and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. ¹⁹They went out from us, <there was already a falling away> but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.***"

IV. Verse 3 (Read):

- A. "that day" = the end of the "day of Christ," meaning His second coming ó now relating back to the subject introduced in verse 1.
- B. "falling away" = "apostasia" or apostasy, -- generally understood to be a defection from the truth. But apostasy can also mean a renunciation or abandonment of a former loyalty.
 1. most believe he is speaking of a general falling away from the truth of the Gospel, as in what many appropriately refer to as the apostate church that comes in the name of Christ. As we just read in I Jn. 2, John was addressing how even in their day of the early church, some had left the true gospel ó showing they really were not true believers with God-given faith to begin with or else they would not have departed.
 2. Flip 1 or 2 pages forward and look with me at I Tim. 4. Here Paul, writing to Timothy says, beginning in vs. 1, "***Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times <which John has said this "last time" or latter time has already begun in their day> some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; ²Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;***"

3. Certainly, this would be in keeping with the sense of an ongoing apostasy that had begun in their day ó describing how those who appeared and professed to be followers of Christ, giving mental agreement to the truth as set forth by Paul and the other disciples, actually would promote a lie contrary to that truth. And this would certainly be troubling to those in the early church, much as it is troubling in every generation (including our own) to have had this deception exposed to us. And with that revelation comes the recognition that multitudes (who come in the name of Christ, who use this very book (the Bible), who claim to believe that salvation is by grace), actually promote something totally opposed to grace, just as we once did ó and all continue to do who remain deceived in the darkness that we all initially grope about in, but from which God's people are ultimately delivered. I'm inclined to believe that this is what was so troubling to these believers at Thessalonica.
4. Alternatively, if we consider that apostasy (or falling away) could refer to any renunciation of a former loyalty, we should consider that perhaps Paul is comforting them with the certainty of salvation so as to not be troubled as they consider these to whom the love of the truth of the Gospel had apparently not taken hold, or as they thought of their lost loved ones. For as the rest of the passage (and particularly verse 13) will show, every single one whom God the Father chose to salvation shall in time be set apart by His spirit (in regeneration and conversion) so as to believe the truth of God's gospel of grace by which they were called ó in essence falling away or being an apostate to the natural religion of works. Clearly, all who come to God-given faith and repentance turn from and renounce their former religion as an apostate to that false doctrine ó turning to the true doctrine of Christ.
5. Now while I lean toward understanding verse 3 to be referring to a general apostasy that shall prevail in the latter days (i.e. ó the period from Christ's death and resurrection until He comes again), I'm not totally sure and certainly not dogmatic about that. So I'll leave that to your own further consideration and study. But what I am sure about is the nature of the deception, the lie that remains concealed to everyone except those recipients of the blessing of eternal life ó the blessing which Christ purchased for them in His obedience unto death on the cross. And that is where I'll continue to direct your attention today.

C. ðí man of sin be revealed, the son of perditionö

1. Not a one man (Antichrist) as is most commonly suggested here, who will come on the scene at some future date and thereby we might know that the end is near.
 - (a) The fallacy of that notion has already been exposed by the passage we read in I John which established that even in their day, there were many antichrists ó so it can't be some one person we're to look for to arrive on the scene.
 - (b) Judas was called the son of perdition and he had already killed himself by this time.
2. ðman of sinö = means a man of offense or a man of lawlessness.

3. "son of perdition" = a son of destruction.
4. I believe this is referring to the personification of the lost man and / or his false religious system, who in his religion promotes the lie, symptomatic of the sin committed by all of us that must and will be revealed in time, to each and everyone for whom Christ purchased spiritual life. Sinners who are saved are arrested, set apart or sanctified by the Holy Spirit as He calls them by His gospel, as this "mystery of iniquity" is revealed that was previously concealed, wherein they reverse courses.
 - (a) Prov. 16:25 "Whereas they were on the way that seemeth right to a man, but the reality is that it is a way that ends in death or destruction (and so, "a son of perdition")"
 - (b) And that way is characterized by their being deceived in unrighteousness "i.e. a way of salvation that would deny that the law must be perfectly satisfied, both in precept and penalty or by Christ alone. This would fit with the description of "a man of sin" or lawlessness, as we imagine that God will save me in spite of my sins, or by overlooking them or a way in which justice to the law does not necessarily have to be served or a way of lawlessness."
5. So as you may have surmised, I believe here these descriptions, along with the descriptions we will be reading in vs. 8 of the "Wicked" one and in vs. 9 as the one "whose coming is after the working of Satan" is merely a personification of the entire realm or system of false religion that comes in the name of Christ, but denies the doctrine of Christ (hence antichrist).

V. Verse 4: (Read)

- A. Be turning to Genesis 3.
- B. Here in vs. 4 we have described this false system that promotes the lie, in opposition to the truth.
- C. And those that promote it "sitteth in the temple of God." This refers to the fact that this deception will take place inside the church that comes in the name of Christ.
- D. And the phrase, "showing Himself that He is God" means that one is setting forth or operating as if he is God. Now how does one do that? Certainly if any fallible human overtly claimed to be God, it would not deceive us nor take any revelation by God's spirit to expose such. So how does anyone operate as if they are God?

E. In Genesis 3, we have the discourse between Satan, in the form of the serpent, with Eve in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, beginning in verse 1 we read: *¹Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? ²And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: ³But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.* <We know from Gen. 2:17 that this was the tree known as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.> *⁴And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: ⁵For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. ⁶And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”*

F. The phrase in vs. 5 where it says that *“and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil,”* communicates that you can discern or perceive what is good or evil for yourselves ó that is that you determine the standard of what is good and evil, contrary to God’s strict standard and opposition to His sovereign authority to do so. I.e. ó You can set the standard as gods. And that is Satan’s lie that is set forth. And as Eve then saw that fruit as *“pleasant to <her> eyes”* ö so do all those who remain deceived take pleasure in something other than God’s standard of righteousness. As verse 12 of our text shows ó they take pleasure in something other than or in addition to righteousness ó taking *“pleasant to <her> eyes”* ö And this is how in vs. 4 of our text, men show (or set forth) themselves as God.

G. We see this prevalent in the religion of our day that comes in the name of Christ as men refuse to acknowledge and bow to the fact that God requires that which they cannot produce for themselves ó a perfect righteousness. Instead, men insist that you can be as gods ó even save yourselves if you, the sinner, will just do <fill in the blanks> _____ whatever. Satan’s lie is that something other than or in addition to Christ’s finished work must be fulfilled in or by you, the sinner.

VI. Verse 5: (Read)

A. Look with me briefly now in Acts 17. The only record we have of what Paul told them is found there, although Paul may be referring to things not recorded for us. But consider what is recorded as we look at the description given to us concerning Paul’s message when he visited Thessalonica.

B. Acts 17: 1-3: *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ²And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”* As we’ve studied this in the past, we’ve noted how this necessity of Christ’s work negates any notion that salvation is conditioned on the sinner’s of men setting up a standard that they could meet by the work of their hands. In understanding that Christ “must needs” have suffered and risen again, we understand that righteousness is the perfect satisfaction to justice that Christ alone rendered in His obedience unto death is necessary and must have been made for any sinner to be reconciled to a holy God – contrary to the lie which suggests there remains something other than the imputed righteousness of Christ to reconcile a sinner before God.

VII. Summary (of Part 1):

Well we’ll stop here and pick up next week beginning in verse 6. But consider what God has communicated to us even in these first 5 verses. We know by scriptural testimony and experience that we are all sinners. The question is, are you a saved sinner?

While next week we will delve into the detailed descriptions of this “mystery of iniquity,” of the sin that deceives us all, called in verse 10, the “deceivableness of unrighteousness,” even from these first 5 verses of 2 Thessalonians, it is obvious that God, through Paul is communicating to us that:

- (1) *í* there is indeed those who will deceive us, a prevalent and pervasive false religion that goes by the same name – who sits in the temple (the so-called Christian church). I.e. – they call themselves Christians and misleadingly and deceptively use God’s word – calling their own prescribed way of salvation to be the way set forth in scriptures – calling it salvation by grace, while in reality they promote the lie wherein the determining factor of one’s eternal destiny is something you, the sinner, can in fact merit for him or herself.
- (2) *í* But to the “brethren,” this false system, this spirit of antichrist, called the “man of sin,” the son of perdition is exposed. They have been convinced of a sin that previously they were oblivious to. There is a revelation that has taken place under the sound of the gospel of grace wherein God’s righteousness is revealed, whereby they discover how sadly mistaken they had been and in God-given faith and repentance see the necessity of Christ’s suffering and death.

In God-given faith and repentance the ðbrethrenö such as Paul is addressing in this passage, see their need for pure, unadulterated mercy. They must have this perfect righteousness which they as sinners cannot contribute one iota toward meriting, but which their Savior alone merited for them ó a righteousness which God graciously has imputed or charged to the account of every sinner to whom this mystery has been revealed.

How about you? Does this mystery remain concealed or has it been revealed? Has God revealed to you the necessity of you possessing His righteousness ó that perfect satisfaction that was established by Christ alone in His life and death on the cross ó His standard of judgment? Well, that's what's revealed in the gospel which Paul says is the power of God unto salvation. I pray God will be pleased to so reveal this mystery to someone who hears this gospel message. May God so richly bless you.

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God's grace found in the only infallible source, God's word itself ó the Bible.

Randy Wages