

The Mystery ó Revealed or Concealed?

Part 2 of 2

(II Thess. 2:6-17)

By Randy Wages

6/7/09

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. Today I will be completing a study we began last week of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2. I've titled this series "The Mystery ó Revealed or Concealed?" As I noted last week, this title was prompted by verse 7 which begins with the phrase "For the mystery of iniquity ó"
- B. You who were here last week, will recall how I introduced this series by noting the distinct opposites set up throughout the chapter:
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.
- C. Last week we covered verses 1-5 so today we will pick up where we left off, beginning in verse 6. Notice that this verse begins with "***And now...***" That is, in light of that which we considered last week in the 1st 5 verses wherein Paul had told them to not be troubled but rather expect the deception inside the church that goes by the name of Christ, indicating this is what shall characterize this age between Christ's death and His second coming, called "the day of Christ." In those 1st 5 verses we saw how that Christ would not come again until a revelation takes place for each and everyone that God had chosen unto salvation (as expressed in verse 13) whereby God delivers them from their own deception in this false religious system, personified by the man of sin, the son of perdition (or destruction) who operates in the apostate church (that calls itself "Christian") as if he is god ó presuming and promoting that a sinner is saved according to their own standard ó based on a condition or requirement they meet in opposition to God's strict requirement of a perfect righteousness that only Christ could and did render in His life and finished work on the cross.

II. Verse 6: (Read)

- A. In I Tim. 2:5-6, we read, “***For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; ⁶Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.***” That is there is an appointed time or season for all for whom Christ gave Himself as a ransom to be testified to concerning His work ó a time for God’s revelation of Himself in Christ to be revealed. And I believe that is the gist of what is meant by vs. 6. Continuing in verse 7, we read .

III. Verses 7-9: (Read)

- A. Both words, ðwitholdethö from vs. 6 and ðlettethö from vs. 7 mean to restrain or hinder. That is, this revelation of what is called the ðWickedö in vs. 8 shall be hindered until the appointed time in which God shall work in each elect sinner to expose this ðmystery of iniquityö that would otherwise continue to deceive us.
- B. Keep in mind what we read last week in I John 2 ó how even in their day, the day John called ðthe last times,ö that the ðmany antichristsö were already at work. Here in vs. 7 we see Paul telling them that ðthe mystery of iniquityö is already at work and shall continue to deceive until the time God has appointed to reveal this mystery individually to each one for whom Christ died.
- C. This mystery of iniquity (like the mystery of the gospel) speaks not of something which is mysterious beyond comprehension ó but rather it is a mystery in the sense that it is something that it is hidden and so must be revealed to us. ðIniquityö here is lawlessness (i.e. ó without regard to the law being satisfied ó without regard to righteousness which refers to the perfect satisfaction to God’s law and revealed will which Christ alone rendered in His obedience unto death.
- D. I believe ðí that Wickedí ö in verse 8 is simply a continuation of the personification of this false system of religion that is antichrist ó that is that comes in the name of Christ but is in opposition to the doctrine of Christ, promoting Satan’s lie.
- E. It’s interesting to consider this word ðcomingö in verses 8 and verse 9. While the English translation often is construed to refer to a future arrival on the scene, the Greek word here may also refer to His presence or a description of when He is near ó suggesting what takes place when His influence is brought to bear. Note in verse 9, it refers to the personification of this false religious system as one ðwhose coming is after the working of Satan.ö This certainly isn’t speaking of some future ðcomingö and so I’m inclined to interpret verse 8 to be referring to Christ’s coming to sinners in God’s appointed time through the preaching of the light of His Gospel.
- F. Notice that it says concerning ðthat Wicked,ö that the “***...Lord shall consume <it> with the spirit of his mouth...***” That is the Lord will destroy Satan’s deceptive influence upon His people by the proclamation of the Gospel that sets forth the righteousness that is revealed therein so as to dispel the ðdeceivableness of unrighteousnessö (as it is called in verse 10), as God’s Spirit applies it to the heart of the believer whom He has quickened (or given Spiritual life) so as to turn to God in faith and repentance.

- G. And then we see the phrase indicating this deception shall be destroyed “... ***with the brightness of his coming..***” That word translated “destroy” means it will be annulled or brought to naught. While many believe this is referring to Christ’s second coming, the context leads me to conclude that this is referring to how the Lord will bring to naught or annul in the minds and hearts of each one for whom Christ died Satan’s influence as the light of the Gospel dispels the darkness of Satan’s lie ó the darkness that would hide the truth from us and have us continue to believe the lie that salvation is conditioned on the sinner in some way or to some degree. As we find in Col. 1:13, where it speaks of God with respect to those He saves, it refers to God as Himí “***Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son;***” And He does so by the “***...brightness of his coming...***”
- H. In 2 Cor. 4:3-4 Paul wrote: “***But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: ⁴In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.***” But here in 2 Thess. 2: 8, we see God’s sheep are healed from their blindness as a revelation takes place in which Satan’s influence is annulled or brought to naught.
- I. Note that in verse 9, it describes how this religion that promotes Satan’s lie is powerful in its deception as it speaks of its operation as “***...with all power and signs and lying wonders.***”
1. Many are thereby deceived as they will look to their physical circumstances. Consider how many people are miraculously healed from diseases that were diagnosed as terminal, a healing which doctors cannot explain. In Luke 17, you may recall the story where Christ miraculously healed the 10 lepers, but only 1 was granted spiritual healing as only one returned to give glory to God. You see, God has truly blessed everyone here as it relates to their circumstances. Why ó He, as the sovereign of this universe gives and sustains your very life ó yet this clearly does not equate to being blessed or healed spiritually. So don’t be deceived by such power, signs and lying wonders ó called “lying,” not in the sense that they are not real, but in that they may deceive us in to equating the wonder or miracle with being spiritually and eternally blessed by God.
 2. Likewise, consider how our emotions are stirred by experiences that are very real to us. The “lying wonders” mentioned here are lies in that they lead us to a false hope ó but we don’t recognize them to be lies. Rather they impress us and add to the deception. E.g. ó The mood and tone of worship services with all the beautiful music, pageantry, etc. moves us. So it’s imperative that we keep in mind the deceptive nature of these things.

3. Recall what Christ said of the preachers of Matt. 7:21 ff, -- these preachers whom God Himself had empowered with the ability to cast out demons and who did so in the name of Christ. He told them to depart from Him, calling them workers of iniquity. That's the same word used in 2 Thess. 2:7, the "mystery of iniquity," meaning lawlessness, wickedness, and unrighteousness. Why did our Lord describe them as workers of iniquity? It was because their plea before Him was the work of their hand and not based upon their need for the one righteousness revealed in God's Gospel. Their confidence was in that which God had in fact enabled them to do, rather than in what God does for His sheep in their Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. So, we see that the issue of the Gospel is God's truth (the truth of God's gospel) versus Satan's lie in opposition to it. All other things that we might look to can and will deceive us. And the deceptive nature of this is further amplified as he continues to describe the operation or working of Satan in verse 10, as we read:

IV. Verse 10: (Read)

- A. This unrighteousness speaks of iniquity (lawlessness or a legal injustice). And so it is to be deceived into believing that we are saved based upon something other than perfect satisfaction to justice or righteousness. Hence it is called unrighteousness. So to be so deceived is to imagine that something other than or in addition to Christ's righteousness imputed will gain eternal acceptance before God.
- B. Note that it refers to it as "***...all deceivableness of unrighteousness...***" You see, this deception comes in many forms. But all of these forms would have us believe that something other than or in addition to the one imputed righteousness of Christ will find us accepted before God and in His favor. Whatever form, if our hope is not solely in Christ and His righteousness alone, it is unrighteousness. And if so, such a one is still deceived and the revelation of God's gospel remains concealed.
- C. And if we imagine that we acquire or procure that righteousness (the merit of what Christ alone produced for us) in any way other than by God's free and gracious imputation (or charging of it) to us, then that too is to remain deceived in unrighteousness or for whatever we imagine we might do to acquire it, is in essence the meeting of the condition or requirement for our salvation or and thereby another righteousness in which we might boast as having distinguished ourselves from other sinners or rather than the distinction being in what Christ our Savior has done for us or and that alone whereby He receives all the preeminence.
- D. And so we see that to persist in this deception is to perish.

E. Why do any perish? Is it God's fault because He didn't reveal it? Is God the villain? No ó it says here ó ***because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*** Now many, as in John's day, may profess to believe the gospel, yet they depart from it, not having a love for it. That is, they ultimately, willfully reject the truth of the Gospel wherein it is proclaimed that salvation is of Christ alone. Do you have a love for Christ's Person and work? Must you have that (His righteousness) or will anything else suffice ó unrighteousness? Look what he says as we consider the next verse.

V. Verses 11-12: (Read)

- A. Note that God Himself shall ultimately give lost sinners what they want, even to the point of sending strong delusion that they would continue to believe the lie. Here is where we see that God would be just to damn us all because of our willful rejection of Him apart from His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus. Why? Because apart from His mercy and grace in Christ, we willfully reject the true Christ and the truth concerning Him revealed in the Gospel and instead we take pleasure in unrighteousness.
- B. Here, I believe he is referring to those who Paul told Timothy (in the passage we looked at last week in I Tim. 4:2) were those who ***“speak lies in hypocrisy.”*** That is under the guise of grace and in the name of Christ they speak in opposition to the truth that salvation is conditioned on Christ alone ó based upon His righteousness alone. And as he said of these, their ***“conscience is seared with a hot iron”*** ó thereby sealed into believing the lie and unable to be reasoned with according to truth. In the original Greek, there is a definite article there at the end of verse 11, preceding the word *lie*. It is the lie ó singular, regardless of its many variations, for it opposes the one truth ó the truth of the gospel that would have us look to Christ and His imputed righteousness alone for all of our salvation.
- C. The concept of taking pleasure in unrighteousness is not to be limited to outward acts of immorality. You see, that takes no special revelation from God under the sound of the Gospel to be recognized ó that is not the sin that would deceive us. Remember in vs. 4, this deceit comes from religion ó from those who sit in the church. Paul described this in Romans 2. There in Romans 2:8 he refers to those who have an obedience of sorts, but he says they do not obey the truth, but they do obey ó they *obey unrighteousness* which opposes the truth ó the truth that God will not save any sinner apart from satisfaction having been made to His law and justice ó apart from the perfect righteousness which Christ alone rendered.
- D. To take pleasure in unrighteousness is to find our delight there ó to be comforted in this false *refuge of lies* as the prophet Isaiah calls it. We either take pleasure (find our hope and comfort) in righteousness or else in unrighteousness. We had best find our pleasure, our delight in that which God is delighted in for ultimately His standard is the only one that matters.

E. As Jeremiah 9 teaches us, ***“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory <i.e. ó place his hope in, have pleasure or delight> in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: ²⁴But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”***

F. Our pleasure must align with that which God Himself takes pleasure or delights in. He doesn't delight in the wisdom of man who acts as god in replacing God's one way of salvation and standard of judgment ó His righteousness, with one of his own ó man's righteousness, something done by or through him, the sinner. God doesn't delight in the might of man's effort in presuming to meet some requirement or condition on his own, and God doesn't delight or take pleasure in the confidence of Satan's operations with signs and lying wonders that would cause one to look at his own physical circumstances ó his own riches or blessings, as an indicator of being blessed spiritually and eternally by God ó but rather God delights in that which He exercises in the earth in God the Son ó the merit of His work alone ó Christ's righteousness.

G. So we see these mutually exclusive, polar opposites here once again. Right now, you, I, and every other sinner on the face of this earth either take pleasure in unrighteousness or else in Christ's righteousness. There's no in-between. One is the broad road that leads to destruction that seems right to us in our spiritual darkness. The other is the way of eternal life revealed by the brightness of His coming ó the light of the gospel that He providentially brings our way wherein His righteousness is revealed ó the light that dispels the darkness wherein we fall prey to Satan's lie.

VI. Verses 13-14: (Read)

A. Here, Paul consoles His brethren in Thessalonica in their knowledge that a revelation has taken place in their hearts whereby they came to a love of the truth. He is speaking to these for whom this spirit of Antichrist has been revealed. In our passage it has been referred to as *“this man of sin”* (or lawlessness), as the *“son of perdition”* (or destruction), as the *“mystery of iniquity”* (or lawlessness) *“that Wicked”* (or lawless one), *“the lie”* (as opposed to the truth of the Gospel). And Paul says that we are bound to give thanks and rejoice that God chose you unto salvation ó as evidenced by your having been sanctified (or set apart) by the Holy Spirit so as to believe the truth ó the truth of the gospel wherein His righteousness is revealed ó as one who is no longer deceived by the sin that deceives us all initially ó the deceivableness of unrighteousness ó of thinking that anything other than or in addition to Christ's righteousness imputed shall merit our eternal blessing before God.

B. And how does this revelation unfold? Verse 14 tells us He calls us by the gospel (the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for therein is His righteousness revealed). Thereby we obtain or come into possession of the knowledge of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as we see how this was merited for us. Just as His glory is hid to those that are lost, we see later on in that same chapter (Quote 2 Cor. 4:6 ó ðFor God, who commandedí)

C. Keeping in mind the context of the entire chapter, we see that Paul is saying, ðDon't be troubled for you are distinguished from those who have departed from the truth and who may have troubled you ó for you have been delivered from such. And it follows that all those who are so chosen unto salvation in Christ shall surely be delivered for God cannot and does not fail. As Christ Himself said in John 6: ***“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. ³⁸For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. ³⁹And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, <i.e. ó those that the Father gave Him and that shall come to Him, who are called by the Gospel by the power of the H/S unto the belief of the truth. Of these He says, theyí > may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”*** What assurance!

VII. Verse 15: (Read) ó Here he tells them therefore ó having the deception (the mystery of iniquity) exposed, stand fast in that which you've been taught by us.

VIII. Verses 16-17: And he finishes with this prayer in verses 16 & 17 which we all should pray for one another (for those of like-minded faith) as he continues saying, (Read verses 16-17). And so I pray the same unto you whom God has likewise already delivered ó to whom the mystery of iniquity, the deceivableness of unrighteousness has been revealed. For the only everlasting consolation and good hope is indeed through grace ó the grace which Romans 5:21 tells us ***“...reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”***

IX. Closing: Likewise, I pray that God may reveal the mystery of iniquity unto others who hear this gospel message. For concurrent with the revelation of this ðmystery of iniquityö (this sin that initially deceives us all) is the revelation of what Paul calls in Eph. 6:19, the ðmystery of the gospelö ó the gospel God wherein His righteousness is revealed. And it's this very gospel that you've heard this very day that God uses to call out His people by His Spirit unto the belief of the truth. 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.