

The Greatest Delusion

By Gary Shepard

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-14
Preached on: Sunday, August 12, 2007

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church
2031 Burgaw Highway
Jacksonville, NC 28540

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/allsovgrace

If I can get gathered together here this morning, I would ask you to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter two.

It is getting harder and harder to be graceful. I reach for my Bible and I drop it on the floor and my notes scatter everywhere and I am reminded that my days are passing swifter than a weaver's shuttle.

2 Thessalonians chapter two.

The title of this message is, "The Greatest Delusion." In this second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul corrects an error that was believed by some. Some thought that Christ's Second Coming and return were immanent. They had an attitude like this. Christ is coming very soon so we don't need to do this or that or the other. But beginning in verse one of chapter two he says that something must happen before the Lord's return. He writes:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of

the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.¹

According to the apostle, not only in this letter, but he says that he had already told them this many times before. He says, "There must be a great falling away."

There must be an apostasy, an apostasy or falling away from the truth, the Word of the truth of the gospel, a falling away of the gospel of the grace of God in Christ and a great deception before the Lord comes the second time.

And according to what he writes here, that was taking place. Even at that hour as the apostles preached and as they taught, that has already begun.

If you look down in verse seven he says that.

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work."²

One of the great ways of deception in our day and every day since Paul's day is to set everything, every warning, everything like apostasy way out in the future. And men look to that while it takes place, even in their day and to them.

The last day or the last days, if you will, are characterized by this falling away and apostasy.

Let me read what the apostle John says in his first epistle.

He says, "Little children, it is the last time."³

You hear all these preaches preaching about the end times that are coming. The end times are here right now.

"[God] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."⁴

He says, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."⁵

In order for there to be antichrist, the Christ had to come. And then he says this again in that same epistle.

¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

² 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

³ 1 John 2:18.

⁴ Hebrews 1:2.

⁵ 1 John 2:18.

“And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”⁶

You see, set in opposition to God’s Christ and his gospel is antichrist and what Paul calls elsewhere another gospel. And so men and women are first deceived by looking to some individual in the future, some personality that will come when just as John says and Paul says, the spirit of antichrist, there are many antichrists even at this time.

This mystery of iniquity, it already works. And this rise of heresy would meet with much reception and many would be deceived and believe a lie rather than the truth. As a matter of fact, what it says there is that many would believe the lie rather than the truth. In other words, set in contrast to the truth, the truth that is in Christ Jesus, the gospel of God in Christ, set against that there is only one thing, the lie.

And many, he says, will believe the lie rather than the truth. If you will look in verse 10 again, it says:

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish;
because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.⁷

Now we did not misread what is said there by the apostle. He said, “God shall send...”⁸

There is no way of changing that. There is no way of diminishing what it says. He says, clearly, and that by the Spirit of God, “God shall send them...”⁹ He shall send them strong delusion.

Somebody translated that “strong deceit.” And the reason for it is, he said, because they receive not the love of the truth.

I can’t say how many times over the years I have had this experience with people. Here would be somebody who had never heard the gospel before, never had any interest in religion before, never had any concern for their soul before, any confrontation with the truth of the Word of God. And so they would come and they would hear the gospel. They would come and have almost a momentary interest in the gospel. And when they are confronted with the realities of the truth, for God with God as he is and with themselves as they are and with this one way of salvation, all of the sudden at some point they are gone. And amazingly, here are these people who never had any interest in religion, any interest in the Bible, any interest in anything and they are now found head

⁶ 1 John 4:3.

⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.

⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:11.

⁹ Ibid.

over heels, lock, stock and barrel in a religion that totally denies the truth. And you never see them again.

They believed what is utterly, almost, it seems, impossible to believe. They swallowed, hook, line and sinker things and doctrines and practices and such that nobody ever would hardly think they ever would. What happens to them?

They are deluded. They are deluded. They are under a strong delusion.

I went to see what that word “delusion” actually means and this is what it means. Something that is believed to be true or believed to be real, but that is actually false and unreal.

Now this may surprise you this morning, but I am going to tell you this. Just because you believe something that does not make it true. And part of this delusion is that if I believe something it must be true or if so and so believes something it must be true. If I feel that this is real, it must be real. But that is not the case.

Delusion implies an inability to distinguish between what is real and what only seems real. Have you ever heard this expression? Well, it is real to me. That is like saying it is real to a dead person or it is real to a blind man or it is real to a mentally deficient individual. It is real to those who have no ability to discern and to truly know whether it is actually real or not. Why? Because we are under a delusion.

Anything... now listen to this. Anything and everything that has to do with God, with salvation, with Jesus Christ, with spiritual things, with eternal things, that does not come from and cannot be supported by the Scriptures all the Scriptures and the Scriptures in context, is a delusion. Now you can just mark that down. I don't care if the Church, so-called, has believed and taught it for 5000 years. I don't care if the pope supposedly speaking *ex cathedra*, which is as God says it or not. I don't care if the nicest person or the worst person or me or my family or whoever it is, whatever has to do with God almighty and that salvation that is in Christ and how he saves sinners, if it is not based on the written Word of God, it is a delusion.

And so this preacher comes on television and he said, “The Lord woke me up in the middle of the night,” a delusion. Or someone says, “I have been knowing this all my life. I have been taught this. My mother believed it. My father believed it. Their parents before them.”

If it is not according to this Word, it is a delusion.

And that is what God says.

Now listen to this. He says, “To the law and to the testimony...”¹⁰

¹⁰ Isaiah 8:20.

That is he Word of God.

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”¹¹

What is that? Truth. None. Are they nice? Maybe so. Have they been at this a long time? Maybe so. Have they written lots of books? Maybe so. Have they done this and done that? Maybe so. But if they speak not according to this book, then no light in them.

And the reason people are so easily deceived is because they have not a clue what the words of this book say. They have taken the words of men rather than study and look for themselves again and again and they have listened to those who have no light in them.

Well, I say, “Well, the Bible said...”

“Well, I don’t really care what the Bible said.”

Well, we better.

Here is something else he said.

For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD.¹²

They say, “Well, we have got a big church. We had 5000 in Sunday school last year, last week. And we built this building and we helped all these missionaries and we did all these things that...”

“If they speak not according to this word,” he said, “I didn’t send them.”

Here he is again in Luke 21.

“Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.”¹³

Don’t go after them. Don’t follow them. They don’t have a clue just like you don’t have a clue and just like I don’t have a clue when he is coming. I am sure he is coming. And the witness of that is the fact that he came the first time and the promise that he gave that he would come again, but I don’t know when that is.

The apostle Paul.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jeremiah 29:8-9.

¹³ Luke 21:8.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”¹⁴

Is he is talking about satanic worship there? No. He is talking about a departure from the true gospel.

Paul again writing to Timothy: “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.”¹⁵

Paul said to those believers at the Church at Thessalonica, “Christ and his return and his coming will not take place until there be this, first this falling away,” and it has already even as the gospel is first preached there after Pentecost and Christ is exalted as the one and only way of salvation, the departure from him and that truth and the spirit of antichrist, it already is taking place.

John said, “Beloved, believe not every spirit.”¹⁶

He is talking about every preacher, every one who is trying to speak in the name of God.

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”¹⁷

How are you going to try them? By this Word.

You see, the names here speak of one that is set forth by this heresy that is proclaimed and everything that is opposed to the doctrine of Christ is antichrist.

Listen to the names. The man of sin, the son of perdition, the mystery of iniquity, that wicked one which shall be revealed, him whose coming is after the working of Satan who comes in all power and signs and lying wonders with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.

Turn over to 2 Corinthians and the fourth chapter. Now I want you to listen to what Paul says here.

Beginning in verse one, 2 Corinthians four.

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty.”¹⁸

Dishonesty is a common practice in religion today by preachers and religious leaders.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 4:1.

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 3:13.

¹⁶ 1 John 4:1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:1-2.

He says, “Not walking in craftiness.”¹⁹

Men are always kind of trying to sneak up on people with God, bait and switch.

“...but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”²⁰

Paul, what are you trying to do? Manifest the truth, preach the truth, tell men and women the truth as it is Christ. Preach the gospel.

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.”²¹

My desire, my effort is to preach what Paul called our gospel. My gospel, he said. And he says here:

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds...”²²

That is where the battle takes place, in the minds of men.

Paul said, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.”²³

Spiritual weapons, we have a spiritual gospel. He said, “...to the pulling down of strong holds... and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”²⁴

Everything that is anti Christ.

“In whom the god of this world...”²⁵

Who is that? That is the one spoken of here, the devil, Satan. Call him by the many names that we find him in Scripture. He is a deceiver. He is transformed into an angel of light. And Paul said, “Don’t be surprised, then, if his messengers, like him, like they also are... appear as angels of light.”

What does that mean? They appear as those who have the truth.

“In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light [the truth] of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”²⁶

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 2 Corinthians 4:3.

²² 2 Corinthians 4:3-4.

²³ 2 Corinthians 10:4.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:4.

What is keeping men and women from believing the gospel, from seeing the truth as it is in Christ? That blindness.

He says:

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.²⁷

Where do you see this light, this truth, this glory of God? He said, "In the face of Jesus Christ."²⁸

He is not talking about a vision there. He is talking about through a proclamation and also a revelation of that Christ and what he accomplished in the gospel because he then says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels."²⁹

Angels do not deliver this message. He says, "God has chosen the weak things, the things that are naught, the things or the individuals that the world hold in the lowest esteem, he has chosen a people, earthen vessels, clay pots to carry this treasure, this truth."

He says, "... that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."³⁰

And if you notice in here he tells us the sad end of those who believe this heresy and error, those who trust in this another Jesus. They perish. It doesn't mean they are annihilated. It means that they suffer the unending eternal wrath of God. They receive not the love of the truth. And God sends them strong delusion and they believe a lie rather than the truth. They believe the lie and are damned.

That is what this book says. And the great majority of mankind is deceived at this moment and in delusion in so many areas about God, about his Son, about the Holy Spirit, about salvation. They are under delusions like this. They say, "We believe that God loves everybody."

That is a delusion. If you could see or speak with those people in the flood who are now in hell, they would tell you different from that. Somebody said years ago, "That wouldn't be a very appropriate sticker to be on the back of the ark, would it, for all those people being destroyed under the wrath of God in that flood. 'Smile, God loves you.'"

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:5-6.

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:6.

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:7.

³⁰ Ibid.

That is a delusion. And yet it is so commonly accepted, so commonly accepted in the light of what the Bible says about those who were destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah, those who are already perishing in hell. And not only that, by plain statements in Scripture, Psalm five verse five.

“The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”³¹

Did you hear that? The psalmist says of God, led by the Spirit of God, “God, you hate all workers of iniquity.”

What does that word iniquity mean? It means inequity. It means that which is not equal to Christ, that which is not equal to what God requires, that which is not equal to that which he gives as a gift. It is inequity.

And the Lord Jesus Christ says in Matthew seven, he says, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”³²

Nobody would come before God and say, “Have we not murdered many people in your name? Have we not committed adultery in your name? Have we not stolen in your name?”

No, they are saying... and with such confidence, such boldness. Why? Because they are under delusion.

And he says to them, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”³³

Your preaching was iniquity. Your works, your giving, all your sacrifices, iniquity. Your casting out the devil, iniquity.

He is the same God who says at least twice, though implies much more, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.”³⁴

And every person, every preacher, I don’t care who it is, where it is or what they are. Every person who says, “God loves everybody,” is under delusion. Why? Because they are not telling you what this book says. He loves a people in Christ. The love of God is in Christ Jesus and outside of Christ God is a consuming fire.

All right. Here is another delusion. Christ died for everybody. Christ died for everybody. When he died on that cross he died for everybody.

³¹ Psalm 5:5.

³² Matthew 7:22.

³³ Matthew 7:23.

³⁴ Romans 9:13.

No, he didn't. He said, "I lay down my life. I give my life for the sheep." He said, "God purchased the Church with his own blood." He said that he laid down his life for his friends. But men would rather believe a lie than what God says.

He says through the prophet Isaiah concerning Christ the Messiah, "He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken."³⁵

Spurgeon said, "If there was not another verse in all of the Bible that teaches clearly the particular redeeming and atoning work of Christ, it is that one."

"...for the transgression of God's people was he stricken, smitten and afflicted of God."

And how would a just God do any other way? If Christ died for my sins and God then cast me into hell, that is the greatest in... that would be a monument to eternal injustice if Christ paid my debt and then God holds it against me. That would be great injustice if I believe what the Scriptures say about his death being a substitutionary death. If he dies in my place and then God casts me into outer death and darkness. That would be injustice. And that is not what the Bible teaches at all.

Some men say, "We believe Christ died for everybody." That is a delusion. His life is a price paid for a people. His death is a substitutionary death in somebody's place.

And then here is another delusion. They say, "God, he is trying to save everybody," and he is pictured as if he is some, oh, disturbed and pitiful being, that he is in a big easy chair in heaven with his head hung over, weeping and crying because sinners won't let him do what he wants to do for them. What a foolish misrepresentation of God. I don't find a God like that anywhere in the Bible except that when it says, "The god of your minds."

Our Lord said, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring."³⁶

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."³⁷

The call of God to his people is a mighty effectual call and he brings everyone he desires to bring.

Whatsoever the Lord desires, that is what he does. He brings them.

"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."³⁸

³⁵ Isaiah 53:8.

³⁶ John 10:16.

³⁷ John 6:37.

³⁸ Psalm 110:3.

Christ said:

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.³⁹

This is not a hit or miss thing. This has got to do with the salvation of a people in Christ that he loves. This has got to do with the glory of God. This is according to the Word of God and there are multitudes of delusions such as free will. There can't be but one free will in this universe.

Did you ever stop and think of how ridiculous that is? There can only be one free will and that is God's will. It is a sovereign will. He does what he will when he will to whom he will, the way that he will and then there is no other.

All the delusions such as the efficacy of some religious icon, if you will kiss a ring or kiss a toe or something, all the delusions that have to do with popery and Mariolatry and ritualism and ceremony and places and pilgrimages and stuff. Delusions.

But I came here today to warn you about the greatest delusion, the most common delusion, the delusion that is at the heart of all these other things.

Look back in verse 10.

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish...”⁴⁰

Verse 12.

“That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”⁴¹

Set in contrast with the truth is what? He says, “Unrighteousness.” It is either the truth or it is unrighteousness.

He characterizes these who perish as they who have pleasure and are content with and satisfied with and trust in a righteousness of their own rather than Christ.

You see, we could get lost in the language of even a chapter like this and miss what is really at the heart. Here is antichrist and the righteousness that they all offer and here is the righteousness of Christ. Here are all these people, all these preachers, all these

³⁹ John 6:44-45.

⁴⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

⁴¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:12.

multitudes and here are all the truths that they offer, the gospels that they offer. And set against that is Christ and his gospel.

They are deluded by a false gospel and hiding in the false refuges of works religion. And here is their delusion. Here is the chief. Here is the greatest delusion. Here is what is at the heart of everything. They are deluded into thinking, they might not even say this out loud. But in their heart of hearts they are deluded into thinking that something they are or something that they have done or that something that they are presently doing or that something that they planned to do soon or that some ceremony such as being sprinkled or baptized or some ritual that they have participated in or that some obedience to a law or to rules or precepts or that something they have now ceased from doing will in at least part have some bearing on their salvation or that God will in some way accept as a righteousness.

In one sense, salvation is presented in our day as being in Jesus and he will make up the difference. Whatever you can't do, he will make up the difference. Wrong, delusion.

Often times it is presented as if, if you will quit doing some things, if you will quit the drinking, if you will quit the carousing around, if you will quit the dope and drugs, if you will quit the wicked, outwardly immoral life, you will be acceptable to God. That is ridiculous. He is an infinitely holy God.

And it is not what you and I would offer to God or what we would count in the sight of God as being the, maybe not good. It is the things that we, in our minds, our natural minds, think that are good. They are just as no good to God as the rest.

This great delusion sometimes is because of some identification we have with a religious body. We joined the church. We are a Baptist or a this or a that or the other. Sometimes it has to do with something in us or some feeling that we have had.

A lady said one time, "Let me tell you what I felt was real."

That doesn't mean it was real in God's sight.

I told you this before. When I was a young person I went to see the movie *Old Yeller*. Do you remember that? And when that dog died, boy, I couldn't help it. I cried. And my emotions were real. But the dog, none of that stuff was real. Do you see that?

We can have real emotions. We can be sincere and be sincerely wrong.

Some experience they had, some decision they made.

I can only shudder at the thought of the multitudes who ran down the aisles at the Billy Graham crusades and such as that and made, as he required, their decision. And they have lived all their days and many of them have already gone out into eternity to meet God with their decision and no righteousness.

But we have a multitude of things that we think will save us or at least in part add to our salvation and they are all just a delusion because there is none righteous, no not one.

And here is the scariest part. It may even be that we imagine ourselves righteous before God because we go to a gospel church or we have some association with one who is a true believer or something like that, deceived into thinking that we are going to kind of be caught up with a group. That is just a delusion.

Something that ought to tell us in a picture how this really is, is some instruction that God gave to Moses and those Israelites concerning worship.

He said, “And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone...”⁴²

What is hewn stone? That is a stone that you take a hammer and a chisel and you kind of shape it into a square or whatever design you want. He said, “When you build me an altar, don’t you build it with any hewn stone.”

“...for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.”⁴³

You have polluted it.

And then he said, “Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar.”⁴⁴

I made it this far. I made... no. That won’t work. Why? Because it was the sacrifice on that altar which pictured Christ that was everything, the [?].

Noah came off that ark, the first thing he does is builds an altar. He didn’t have to look of any tools, just what God provided, raised up the altar, offered the sacrifice. They pictured the doing and dying of Christ.

Abraham, he moved here and there. Everywhere he got, the first thing he demonstrated to the world was the only way that he knew that God would accept him and make him righteous. He raised up that altar, offered that sacrifice.

Call everything else whatever it is that you will. And it is called by men different names and sometimes not even by a name itself, because we are not even all together conscious that we are trust in this, but it is all self righteousness.

We are deceived into thinking that self righteousness is what God accepts.

It started out with the first men, Cain and Abel.

⁴² Exodus 20:25.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Exodus 20:26.

Cain, “I am going to give God my best.”

Abel, “I must give God what he requires which he has already provided.”

This greatest delusion is the notion that if we do our best, how many people to one degree or another in one way or another believe this is a frightening thing, that if we just do the best that we can, God will count it for righteousness and accept us when he will not. He won't.

If you think that righteousness in any way comes by your works or your obedience to some rule or some principle, even to the law of God, you are deluded. That law only showed us that there was no way we could do anything to please God.

Salvation is 100 percent grace, not a mixture of grace and works. It is 100 percent grace. It is 100 percent in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is 100 percent for the glory of God and not us.

Turn over to Galatians chapter two.

I know you won't believe me and apart from God's grace you won't believe him, but I am going to read some Scriptures with you and I hope you will be able to hear. Galatians two and verse 16.

Paul says:

“Knowing that a man is not justified...”⁴⁵ that means declared or counted righteous by God.

“...by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”⁴⁶

Do you hear that? That is not my view. That is what God said.

All right. Look down at verse 21.

“I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law...”⁴⁷ which simply means by any principle of our doing, “then Christ is dead in vain.”⁴⁸

Look over in Ephesians chapter two down at verse eight.

⁴⁵ Galatians 2:16.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Galatians 2:21.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

“For by grace are ye saved...”⁴⁹

That is free, unmerited, undeserved, unasked for.

“For by grace are ye saved...”⁵⁰

And that will never mean anything to you until you find out what you are in yourself, till the Spirit of God shows you what a bankrupt, empty, unable, unholy thing that you are in yourself. And that will be sweet music.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.⁵¹

Turn over to Romans the third chapter. Romans chapter three verse 19.

“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”⁵²

Why would you want every mouth to be stopped? Why is that? Because every mouth is telling God how good they are and what they have done and how not guilty they are.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”⁵³

Look over in Romans four verse four.

“Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.”⁵⁴

That is why the Bible says that, “The wages of sin is death.”⁵⁵

“But to him that worketh not...”⁵⁶

That doesn't mean that believers live ungodly lives or they don't care, they can sin all they want. That is not what that means. To him that works not to establish a righteousness before God as the basis of our salvation.

But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also

⁴⁹ Ephesians 2:8.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ephesians 2:8-9.

⁵² Romans 3:19.

⁵³ Romans 3:20.

⁵⁴ Romans 4:4.

⁵⁵ Romans 6:23.

⁵⁶ Romans 4:5.

describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.⁵⁷

How do we have a righteousness? If God in mercy imputes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

All right. Look over in verse five in chapter five verse 17.

“For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness...”⁵⁸

There it is right there. The gift of righteousness. If you ever have a righteousness it will have to be given to you of the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“(...shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”⁵⁹

He is telling us what happened to all who are in Adam and what happens to all who are in Christ.

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”⁶⁰

How are they made righteous? By the obedience which is his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross.

Turn over to Romans 10 and listen to Paul concerning his own people.

Romans 10 and verse one.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”⁶¹

Somebody says, “Well, if you preach what you preach, that means you don’t want anybody to be saved.”

That didn’t affect Paul that way, did it?

“...that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Romans 4:5-6.

⁵⁸ Romans 5:17.

⁵⁹ Romans 5:17-18.

⁶⁰ Romans 5:19.

⁶¹ Romans 10:1.

Their zeal is that zeal of delusion. It is not according to knowledge.

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ...”⁶³

Only Christ, only his obedience.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”⁶⁴

Paul says that God made him, Christ, who knew no sin, he made him to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And that is the only one there is, in him.

I could just read on and on verse after verse again and again. Nobody is righteous by what they do. Nobody is righteous by who they are. Nobody is righteous by how they feel. None of these things. But they are righteous in Christ and Christ alone. And that righteousness that he gives, he enables them to receive the experience of it and the comfort of it and the delight of it and the peace of it when he gives them faith.

Oh, when Paul warned about all this. If you turn back to our text he says, “All this will happen and it does happen and it will continue to happen until Christ comes.”

But if you will look at verse 13 of chapter two, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, this next word he says, “but...”

An old writer I read many years ago, I don’t even remember who he was. He said, “And this is one of those buts of grace.” That is what happens to everybody unless God buts in. But....

He says to these believers in the Church at Thessalonica, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.”⁶⁵

Ephesians one. Chosen you in Christ, blessed you with all spiritual blessings. The only reason why you are not in the mainstream of this world is because of an act of divine sovereignty and love and grace.

But God, he loved you. How could he love us any more than he loved anybody? In Christ. And chose us:

⁶² Romans 10:1-2.

⁶³ Romans 10:3.

⁶⁴ Romans 10:4.

⁶⁵ 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

“...to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁶

That salvation that is in Christ, that righteousness that is in Christ, that inheritance that is in Christ, that forgiveness that is in Christ, that blessing that is in Christ through sanctification, a work of his Spirit wherein he sets his people apart, gives them faith and they believe the truth which is the gospel.

They would be just like every other person under this great delusion. But he comes and he commands his light to shine in their hearts and he reveals his glory, his salvation, his gift of righteousness in the face of Jesus Christ.

Have you heard the truth? Believed the truth? Loved the truth? Christ is the truth. And salvation, all hope, all righteousness, is in him and through him and by him.

In this book we find a lot of things that we are commanded to do. But we are not commanded to do any of them to be saved.

Somebody says, “Well, wait a minute. The condition of salvation is faith, believing.”

No, it is not. It is Christ is salvation and believing is ceasing to do. It is likened in Hebrews and other places to rest. It is like God when he finished the work of creation. He rested. That means he ceased from doing. And we cease from doing anything to be saved, to establish righteousness. And then because of God’s mercy to us, we hear what he says and we do them as willing servants, as faithful children, as those who love him because he first loved us.

And this is what the old hymn writer meant.

My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

Salvation in Christ, salvation by his grace which is righteous grace that Paul says is in and through and by his life and sacrifice. That is everything. That is everything and everything else is a delusion, just a delusion.

Everything but him and what he has done and what he is doing right now and everything that distracts us from that is just delusion. When the Lord Jesus Christ stood in that everlasting covenant before the world began, he was saving his people. When he was made flesh and came into this world and lived as he lived that perfect life and then went to that cross as the one sacrifice for sins forever, he was saving his people. When he entered into glory and there as our high priest offered his blood as that sacrifice, he was saving his people. When he sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high because

⁶⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14.

God had accepted his person and his work, he is saving his people. He is right now saving his people.

And that is the gospel of this book. And everything else is a lie, the lie.

May God help us to believe the truth, to look outside of ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, to have hope only in him and what he has done and never for one second ever imagine that anything else or anyone else or anything about us has one iota to do with this great salvation.

Someone said, "You mean to tell me I have nothing to do with my salvation?"

Well, not only this. You did the sinning and God does all the saving.

Our Father, this day we give you thanks and praise. Lord, run us from every false refuge and keep us from hiding in anything done by self or, Lord, defend us from the very errors that invade our minds, sown on every hand and blasted on every front from antichrist, from this mystery of iniquity that already works, this spirit of the evil one, the deceiver. May we rest in Christ. Give him all the glory. Find that peace that characterizes your kingdom, kingdom of God. Your kingdom is not external things such as meat and drink, but righteousness in Christ and the peace that comes from that and the joy that comes from that peace. May you be pleased at this hour to reveal this truth in the hearts of all who hear this according to your will in Christ's name. Amen.

Bless you.