

2 THESSALONIANS 2  
1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS



T. M. Moore  
*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

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## 2 Thessalonians 2: Introduction

False teaching was upsetting the Thessalonians, and Paul addresses it head on. False teachers are serving themselves and the devil as they lead believers into denying God and practicing lawlessness. The Thessalonians should stand fast in and hold firm to the sound teaching of Christian teaching, that which derives from the apostles. Those who were troubling them would come under the judgment of God in due course.

Paul was persuaded that the Thessalonians would continue in the grace of God. He urged them to keep their eyes on Jesus and continue in the path of obedience. God would meet them with His grace to sustain and carry them through.

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## 1 The Falling Away

*Pray Psalm 2.1-3.*

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2.1-3.*

*Reflect.*

1. What is *falling away* (apostasy)? Falling away from what?
2. What would cause someone to fall away?

*Meditate.*

The verses we will examine in the next few installments are difficult. Believers have differed, and even quarreled, over their interpretations of these verses. We will try to understand Paul’s teaching in the light of his other writings and related portions of Scripture.

First, we finally discover what has been troubling the Thessalonians and Paul: Some were teaching that Jesus had already returned and because the Thessalonians were not part of that *gathering together to Him*, they must not have been truly saved. Paul denies being the author of this nonsense, even though (v. 2), the false teachers may have been claiming his authority. So, to begin with, Paul puts the Thessalonians at ease (v. 2).

He continues then to unfold more details of what must happen before the coming of the Lord. He mentions two benchmark events, the *falling away* and *the man of sin* (Greek: ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, the man of lawlessness). Let’s take a closer look at the first of these.

The *falling away* (Greek: ἡ ἀποστασία, the apostasy or rebellion) is mentioned first. The NKJV translation does not quite capture the thrust of the verb, which is more aggressive and determined. *Falling away* is something that might happen to someone; *apostasizing* or *rebelling* is more active and intentional, and this is what Paul intends. A time is coming when widespread apostasizing or rebelling will be manifest. But from what?

From the worship of God, essentially (v. 4). Instead of worshipping God, many will reserve the right to choose or to be their own gods, and to chart their own course in life rather than to submit to the holy and righteous and good Law of God (cf. Rom. 1.18-32; Rom. 7.12). And what’s most troubling about this is that many will do so *while yet claiming to worship God and to follow Jesus*. Otherwise, why would the false teachers have troubled the Thessalonians so much, if not that they were claiming to speak in the names of Paul and Jesus?

Jesus will not come again until, on a widespread scale, people have rejected God and His Anointed One and thrown off His Law and all His Word, preferring their own laws and ways to His. Apostasy of one form or another has been associated with the Christian movement throughout the course of history. Was Paul thinking ahead to those days, to warn believers in every age to keep a close watch on themselves and the teaching they embrace (1 Tim. 4.16)?

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There is a word of warning for us in this: It is possible to apostasize and not even realize it. All who neglect or deny God's Law reveal something about their hearts which indicates that rebellion has infested their souls.

This time of *apostasy* or *rebellion* will bring forth a new kind of *man* – a *man of lawlessness*.

*Prepare.*

1. How can we tell when our worship is true worship of God or just something we enjoy for ourselves – and hence, worship of ourselves?

2. What do you think would be the signs that someone was beginning to *fall away* or *apostasize* from God?

3. Should we expect the threat of rebellion against God to always be so blunt as in Psalm 2.1-3. Explain.

*Such is Paul's account. And we have reached the "falling away." Men, that is, have fallen away from the true faith. Some proclaim the identity of Father and Son. Others dare to assert that one should believe Christ has come into existence out of nonexistence. Formerly heretics were quite evident, but now the church is full of masked heretics. For men have deserted the truth and want to have their ears tickled. Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD), Catechetical Lectures 15.9*

*Guard my heart, O Lord, that I may not despise or neglect Your Word, lest I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.*

This psalm envisions a cosmic conflict involving God and His Anointed One, ruling in the midst of His people, against those who reject Him and His Law. Pray for believers who are being openly persecuted by these lawless men, and pray that God would revive His Church and renew His people in Christ and His Law.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 2** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!  
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.  
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav'n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: how blessed are all who rest in Him!

## 2 The Man of Lawlessness

Pray Psalm 2.1-3.

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”

Read 2 Thessalonians 2.3, 4.

Reflect.

1. What is *lawlessness*? Why did Jesus warn us against lawlessness in Matthew 24.12?

2. Paul elsewhere describes the church as the temple of the Lord, and believers individually are temples as well (Eph. 2.19-22; 1 Cor. 6.19, 20). Should this have any bearing on how we understand *temple* in verse 4?

Meditate.

The second benchmark, beside the *falling away* or *apostasy*, indicating that the way is clear for the Lord to return is the appearance of the *man of sin* (v. 3). The Greek term, as we have seen, is *man of lawlessness*, whom Paul further identifies as the *son of perdition*. The Greek word ἀπωλείας, means destruction or waste. The lawless man destroys and wastes whatever comes under his power. He thinks of himself and acts like he is God, a law unto himself, with no regard whatsoever for the true God or His ways.

Who is this *man of lawlessness*?

Paul may be having a prophetic insight here to the blasphemous actions of the Romans in destroying the temple of Jerusalem in 70 AD, thus making themselves above God, not unlike what we read in Psalm 2.1-3.

He also may be thinking of one particular man, generally referred to as antichrist, who, many believe, will be manifest in the last days just prior to the return of the Lord, and who fits the remit described here. But then John said that “many antichrists” had already made themselves visible in his day (1 Jn. 2.18, 19), and many of these lawless and destructive people had previously associated themselves with the Church.

More likely – and here I am not completely alone in my view – Paul may be referring to a *type* of man, like the type of the righteous and the unrighteous man in Psalm 1 (“Blessed is the *man*...”). A type of man is coming who will have no regard for God or His Law, will set himself up as his own god, and who will bring to waste and destruction whatever comes under his sway. This type of man – like the many antichrists to whom John referred – will even be found in the temple of the Lord, the Church, and his tendencies may reside even in our own souls. These are people who act without regard to God and His Law, or who intentionally vaunt their own views above the revelation of God.

Where lawlessness abounds, love for God and neighbors falls into serious decline, as Jesus warned. If we regard the *man of lawlessness* as a type of man, a particular kind of person, we have to say that such antichrists exist already in our day, and can be found even in the Church, where they deny the Law of God and push their own agendas rather than that of the Lord.

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The *apostasy* and the *man of lawlessness* may well be upon us already.

*Prepare.*

1. How can we make sure in our own lives that we're not drifting into *lawlessness*?
2. Is *lawlessness* always as blatant as in Psalm 2:1-3, where people deliberately throw off the bonds and cords (Law) of God? Explain.
3. In what ways might the *man of lawlessness* show up in your own soul?

*But Paul calls him "the son of perdition," because he is also to be destroyed. But who is he? Satan? By no means. Rather he is a man in whom Satan fully works. For he is a man... For he will not introduce idolatry but will be a kind of opponent to God. He will abolish all the gods and will order men to worship him instead of God. He will be seated in the temple of God, not that in Jerusalem only, but also in every church. John Chrysostom (344-407 AD), Homilies on 2 Thessalonians 3*

*Search me, O God! Show me where any lawlessness may be lingering in me, and help me to...*

*Pray Psalm 2.*

Today, as you pray this psalm, let the Word of God reveal any lawlessness in you, any area of your life which you have not submitted completely to Him. Give it to Him today, repent, and ask the Lord to show you how to obey Him in this area.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 2** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?  
Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

"Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!  
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!"

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.  
His angry Word to them is plain: "Yet shall My King in Zion reign!"

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav'n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: how blessed are all who rest in Him!

### 3     **Restrained**

*Pray Psalm 79.8, 9.*

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!  
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,  
For we have been brought very low.  
Help us, O God of our salvation,  
For the glory of Your name;  
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,  
For Your name's sake!

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2.5-8.*

*Reflect.*

1. What is the “mystery of lawlessness”? In what sense or senses is it “already at work” among us?
2. What is restraining the man of lawlessness from visiting destruction and waste (*perdition*) on all the world?

*Meditate.*

The “mystery of lawlessness” was already at work in Paul’s day, but it would get worse before the coming of the Lord. Paul had explained this to the Thessalonians while he was still with them. But the pressure from false teachers had caused them to begin losing sight of that sound instruction.

What is the “mystery of lawlessness”? We experience it every time we see something horrible or hear about something truly dastardly, and we say, “How can people do this to others?” Or when some white collar criminal is exposed, and we say, “How could he have so little regard for others?” Or when we hear the annual tally of abortions in this country, and we ask, “What’s wrong with people, that they cannot see the evil in this?” It’s indeed a mystery how people can be so cruel, deceitful, conniving, misleading, and lacking in compassion. The mystery of lawlessness can be understood only in the light of the Law of God, which is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7.12). People who scorn that Law, preferring to be a law unto themselves, will do whatever they think they can get away with to satisfy their own selfish interests. No mystery there. The only mystery is just how deep and dark the sea of lawlessness can be.

But even now the man of lawlessness is restrained from visiting the worst of his destructive and wasteful ways on the world. God restrains him. The Holy Spirit restrains him. The presence of people who believe in God and who live by His Word and Law restrains him. The lingering echo of a Christian consensus in law and social order restrains the man of lawlessness. Even the fact that lawless people have the works of God’s Law written on their hearts restrains at least some of them from doing the worst they could imagine.

But a day is coming when those restraints will be lifted, probably gradually, and lawlessness will be the new law, the norm for human life. But before the man of lawlessness can destroy the world and himself, the Lord will return to do the job for him (v. 8). Paul intended to encourage the Thessalonians with these words, by giving them a context for understanding the lawlessness they were already experiencing and that which is yet to come.

*Prepare.*

1. How does God use individual believers to restrain the spread of lawlessness in their Personal Mission Field?

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2. When believers identify lawlessness within their spheres of influence, what should they do? What about when they find lawlessness in their own souls?

3. Lawlessness will continue and increase until Christ comes again. Does this mean we shouldn't work hard to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom, coming on earth as it is in heaven? Explain.

*That which restrains and prevents the coming of the lawless one is the Holy Spirit. Severian of Gabala (fl. ca. 400 AD), Pauline Commentary from the Greek Church*

*Lord, teach me to love Your Law, then use me to...*

*Pray Psalm 79.*

Pray for the persecuted Church throughout the world. Pray that your own church will resist the lawlessness of the world and hold fast to the Word and work of God. And pray that God would restrain and reproach lawless people who mock His Name; and cause many of them to come to repentance.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 79** (*Passion Chorale: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*)

O God the nations all Your inheritance have spoiled!  
Your City have they ruined, Your temple they have soiled!  
Your servants' bodies all to the birds of heav'n are thrown;  
The flesh of all Your faithful the jaws of beasts now own.

The blood of faithful servants like water flows around;  
And none are there Your saints to commit into the ground.  
Our neighbors mock and scorn us: How long, O Lord, how long?  
How long will You be angry and scorn our mournful song?

Pour out, O Lord, Your wrath on all who deny Your Name;  
Who trust You not nor seek You, bring down to deepest shame!  
For they have with great rancor Your precious saints devoured;  
Lay waste their habitation at this late dreadful hour.

Why should the nations mock and say, "Where now is their God?"  
Let there be known among them harsh vengeance for our blood!  
Hear, Lord, our groans and sighing; preserve us by Your pow'r.  
For we are fairly dying each day and hour by hour.

Reproach those who reproach us with judgment sevenfold!  
Let thanks and praise to You by Your precious flock be told.  
We are Your sheep, O Savior, we thank You all our days.  
Look on us with Your favor as we declare Your praise.

## 4 The Lie

Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;  
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2.9-11.

Reflect.

1. What kind of “power, signs, and lying wonders” did Paul have in mind? How were these being used?
2. The antidote to *unrighteous deception* is *the love of the truth*. What does Paul mean by that?

Meditate.

There’s a danger, whenever the name *Satan* is mentioned, of over-spiritualizing things. Those who take up the lifestyle of *the lawless one* or *the man of lawlessness* are enmeshed in the workings of Satan, who seeks to deceive people and keep them from the truth so as to destroy them.

How does he do that? By impressing and enthralling them with *all power, signs, and lying wonders*. But we should not think merely in “spiritual” terms when we consider these. Satan knows how to use all kinds of tools to capture people for the lie. *Power* might be political power or military might (think: Roman Empire). *Signs* could include whatever impresses people enough to make them happy or divert them from the truth. Some forms of entertainment might well qualify (think: Augustine’s denouncement of the gladiatorial games). *Lying wonders* might refer to those who offer explanations of the world and its existence that deny and reject any role for God, but who make impressive cultural advances nonetheless. Like much of contemporary science and education.

The Lord allows the devil to use such tools in his campaign to deceive people into living the lie. The lie insists that God is irrelevant and we are free to worship what we like – whether material happiness, fleshly indulgence, or just our own thoughts and desires. We are living a lie when anything replaces the sovereign God and His grace and truth as the defining and organizing framework for our lives (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

When people buy this line, God *will send them strong delusion* so that they really believe the lie and refuse to acknowledge God and His truth. This might be a description of our modern, “enlightened” world, with its reliance on politics, penchant for war, enthrallment with science and technology and education, and refusal to allow God any meaningful place in the public square.

It looks very much to me like *the coming of the lawless one* is upon us. Our task is to focus on Jesus’ soon return, knowing that this will bring an end to all lawlessness; continue working out our salvation and seeking the Lord’s Kingdom; and be very careful not to succumb to the lie in any area of our lives.

Prepare.

1. In what ways does the secular worldview represent the lie? How pervasive is that worldview?
2. Christians sometimes make mistakes in their calling by using the wrong tools to achieve their calling to the Kingdom and glory of God. Power, signs, and lying wonders must never be our approach to seeking the

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Kingdom and glory of God? Why not? What approach has God outlined for us?

3. People who choose not to believe the truth have only the lie to fall back on. Should this be a matter of concern to us? Explain. Is it unfair of God to condemn such people? Why not?

*For to believe a lie and not believe the truth is indeed sin, but it comes from the blindness of heart which by a hidden but just judgment of God is also punishment for sin. Augustine (354-430 AD), Against Julian 5.3.12*

*Shelter me firmly in Your truth, O Lord, and help me to resist the lie wherever I encounter it, as in...*

*Pray Psalm 12.*

Pray for people you know who are trapped in the lie. Seek the Lord to further immerse you in the shelter of His Word.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 12** (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be; they who believe in Christ are few.  
Falsely the wicked confidently flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies, all those who speak with boasting tongue!  
See how Your holy Word they despise, while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all Your precious children sore distressed.  
Save those who faithfully on You call; grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true, like silver seven times refined.  
You will preserve Your Word ever new, and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand; Your indignation builds on high.  
Men may exalt their wicked plans, but You will judge them by and by.

## 5 Two Peoples

*Pray Psalm 52.9.*

I will praise You forever,  
Because You have done *it*;  
And in the presence of Your saints  
I will wait on Your name, for *it is* good.

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2.11-14.*

*Reflect.*

1. Paul indicates there are two kinds of people in the world. What are they?
2. Paul mentions two types of beliefs in these verses. What are they?

*Meditate.*

Two peoples exist in the world – those who know God through Jesus Christ and those who do not. Those who do not have chosen, Paul says, to believe the lie that God is either irrelevant or non-existent. They have turned away from Him, under the deluding power of the devil, to seek pleasure in unrighteousness. Note: Pleasure in itself is not bad; what's bad is finding pleasure in unrighteousness (cf. Ps. 16.11). The people of the lie will be condemned for rejecting God to indulge all manner of unrighteousness.

Those who believe in the truth that is in Jesus have been loved and chosen by God for this grace; and they must build on the gift of salvation to grow in the Lord, becoming increasingly sanctified. Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians, that not only has His grace reached them for salvation, but His grace is working in them “through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

In the Gospel we are called to *obtain* the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word here translated *obtaining* (περιποίησις) means *to experience, to have something as a possession*. Salvation is not just something we affirm in our heads; it is an experience that encompasses and transforms our whole lives for the glory of the Lord. We experience more of the salvation we have received as we work hard at our sanctification. We remember that Paul said (1 Thess. 2.12) we are called to the Kingdom and glory of God. Here he affirms that again; thus he reminds the Thessalonians of the ultimate objective of doing everything for the glory of God and His truth.

We should follow Paul's example of giving thanks for faithful believers, and of letting them know that we pray for them and rejoice in their faithfulness. And we should follow the example of the Thessalonians in working out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12).

*Prepare.*

1. How is salvation related to sanctification? How are both of these related to the Kingdom and glory of God?
2. How should understanding the plight of lost people affect us? What can you do to show the love of God to the lost people in your Personal Mission Field?
3. How should the possibility of *obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ* affect the way you live each day?

*He calls them beloved of the Lord, for this reason, that they may the better consider that the sole reason why they are exempted*

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*from the almost universal overthrow of the world, was because God exercised towards them unmerited love.* John Calvin (1509-1564 AD), *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2*

*Thank You for loving and saving me, Lord; help me today to work out my salvation as I...*

*Pray Psalm 52.*

Give thanks to God for His mercy and many blessings, and pray for lost people, that they might turn from wickedness and the lie, and worship God through Jesus Christ.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 52** (*Warrington: Give to Our God Immortal Praise*)

Why do the mighty boast in sin? God's love endures, it knows no end!  
They with their tongues vain boasts repeat, and like a razor, work deceit.

Men more than good in evil delight, and lies prefer to what is right.  
They utter words, both harsh and strong, with their devouring, deceitful tongue.

God will forever break them down, uproot, and cast them to the ground!  
He from their safety tears them away, no more to know the light of day.

The righteous see and laugh and fear, and say, "Behold, what have we here?  
Such are all who at God conspire, and wealth and evil ways desire.

"But as for me may I be seen in God an olive ever green!  
Ever in God, most kind and just, shall I with joy and gladness trust!"

Thanks evermore to our Savior be raised! His faithfulness be ever praised!  
Here with Your people, loving God, I wait upon Your Name, so good!

## 6 Stand Fast, Hold Firm

*Pray Psalm 12.1, 2.*

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;  
*With* flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2.15-17.*

*Reflect.*

1. What *traditions* does Paul have in mind here? How does one *stand fast* in such traditions?
2. What is needed for us to persevere in *every good word and work*?

*Meditate.*

False teachers will always be present within the Christian movement. The only way to recognize false teaching and to resist its allure is by standing fast and holding to *the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle.*

Wait. Didn't Jesus condemn the Pharisees for standing fast and holding firm to their traditions (Matt. 15.2)? It's not *tradition* we want, but God's Word, right?

Actually, we want both, just as Paul explained. The idea of *tradition* (Greek: *παράδοσις*, the content of traditional instruction – teaching, tradition) merely indicates a body of teaching. Traditions can be true or false, useful or an obstacle to faith. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for standing fast and holding firm to their traditions, it was because they had set the traditions of man *over* the Word of God, thus nullifying the Word by their traditions.

Valid traditions serve the Word and provide means for us to stand fast in it and hold firm to it. The Apostles' Creed enshrines a tradition of essential Gospel teaching from the first centuries of the Christian movement. It provides a valid and useful summary of Christian doctrine, which is why we still confess it today. The ancient writers from whom we quote in these studies also convey the true tradition of Christian teaching. We use them precisely for that point, to show that our understanding of Scripture today has long-standing support.

Paul urged the Thessalonians to stand fast and hold firm to those traditions which agreed with him and the other apostles. This is always the benchmark for determining the validity and usefulness of any tradition, whether of teaching or practice: Does it derive from and comport with the teaching of Scripture, especially as understood by the apostles?

In his benediction ("Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself..." v. 16), Paul again alludes to the two crucial ingredients for sanctification: God's grace coupled with our efforts (Phil. 2.12, 13). He prays the Lord's grace to be with them, and he urges them to continue *in every good word and work*. For the words *consolation* and *comfort*, substitute *encouragement* and *encourage*. These include the ideas of comfort and consolation, but extend beyond them to embolden believers for right action. God's grace is always unto sanctification and action.

*Prepare.*

1. Hymns are another means of preserving valid and Biblical traditions. Can you give an example?

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2. What is required for us to *stand fast and hold* the true traditions of our faith? How could you incorporate some of this into your daily time with the Lord?

3. God's grace is never given merely for us to soak in it; it is always intended to bring forth good words and good works (Eph. 2.8-10). Why do we need *encouragement* for such works?

*In learning and professing the faith, embrace and guard that only which is now delivered to you by the church and confirmed by all the Scriptures. For since not everyone has the education and the leisure required to read and know the Scriptures, to prevent the soul perishing from ignorance, we sum up the whole doctrine of the faith in a few lines.* Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386 AD), *Catechetical Lectures* 5.12

*Thank You, Lord, for those faithful saints in the past who have preserved the teaching of Your Word so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 12.*

Thank the Lord for His Word, our sheltering place against the lies and deceptions of an age in flight from God. Thank Him for those faithful saints who, down through the ages, have taught and kept and expounded the Word in faithful traditions of orthodox Christian faith. Commit yourself to renewed faithfulness in reading and obeying the Word of God.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 12** (*Hamburg: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*)

Help, Lord! The godly cease to be; they who believe in Christ are few.  
Falsely the wicked confidently flatter, deceive, and mock Your truth.

Stop, Lord, the lips that utter lies, all those who speak with boasting tongue!  
See how Your holy Word they despise, while their own praises they have sung.

Rise up, O Lord, and rescue all Your precious children sore distressed.  
Save those who faithfully on You call; grant them deliv'rance, peace, and rest.

Your words are pure and proven true, like silver seven times refined.  
You will preserve Your Word ever new, and keep the heart to You inclined.

Proudly the wicked strut and stand; Your indignation builds on high.  
Men may exalt their wicked plans, but You will judge them by and by.

## 7 Apostasy and Lawlessness

*Pray Psalm 2.1-3.*

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”

*Read 2 Thessalonians 2.1-17.*

*Reflect.*

1. Is *falling away* (*apostasy*) something that happens all at once or gradually? How is apostasy related to lawlessness?

2. By grace we are saved and by grace we are sanctified. But does this mean we have nothing to do in the process of becoming more like Jesus?

*Meditate.*

Heresies appear in every generation, and heretical teachers always manage to draw enough people to their teaching to make many begin to wonder if perhaps they've got it right.

How can we know what is heretical and what isn't? One or more of the following features, which the Thessalonians were confronting, may be discerned.

First, heresy detracts from the worship of God, exalting men and their views instead (v. 4). Heretics know themselves to be on the fringe, so to establish their teaching, they need to draw as many followers as possible, and this usually entails having a single individual or a cadre of individuals at the core of the movement, insisting that their views are true.

Second, heretics twist the teaching of Scripture, reinterpreting venerable texts and turning away from received traditions to establish new views and new angles on the Word of God (v. 2). Their use of the Bible is selective, and their regard for ancient Christian teachings is non-existent.

Third, heretics have little use for the Law of God (vv. 6, 7). Whereas Jesus and the apostles, and the long and venerable tradition of Christian teaching, have always seen the Law as foundational to a life of good works, heretics will avoid the Law as onerous and outdated.

Back of all heresies is some desire to find a shortcut to pleasure, even if the pleasure is only some form of spiritual ecstasy (v. 12). Experiences of “spiritual high” are touted for their own sake, and not for the knowledge and glory of God. Acquisitiveness, sexual license, and other forms of fleshly indulgence are frequently the end of heretical teaching.

To recognize and resist heretical teaching, and thus to avoid falling into apostasy and lawlessness, we must stand fast on the Word of God and hold firm to the ancient teachings of the faith, persevering in love and good works for the glory of Christ and God (vv. 13-17).

2 Thessalonians 2  
1 and 2 Thessalonians

*Prepare.*

1. How would you counsel a new believer to *stand fast and hold the traditions* of orthodox Christian teaching?
2. Heretics are very sincere in their beliefs, and so may plead and defend them passionately. How should we respond to those who hold heretical views?
3. How can believers help one another resist the drift into apostasy and lawlessness?

*Paul, accordingly, would have the Thessalonians stand, not merely when others continue to stand, but with a more settled stability; so that, on seeing almost all turning aside from the faith, and all things full of confusion, they will, nevertheless, retain their footing. And assuredly the calling of God ought to fortify us against all occasions of offense in such a manner, that not even the entire ruin of the world shall shake, much less overthrow, our stability.* John Calvin (1509-1564 AD) *Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2*

*Help me to be alert to any tendency to drift from You, Lord, and to resist that tendency by...*

*Pray Psalm 2.*

Pray for the lost and lawless of this world, that they might heed the Lord's call to submit to Jesus and be saved. Pray also that the Lord will keep you to Himself, lest you drift into apostasy.

*Sing to the Lord.*

**Psalm 2** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?  
Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

"Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!  
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!"

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.  
His angry Word to them is plain: "Yet shall My King in Zion reign!"

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav'n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: how blessed are all who rest in Him!

*2 Thessalonians 2  
1 and 2 Thessalonians*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is heresy, and what is its allure to believers?
2. Turning away from God's Law leads to love growing cold (Matt. 24.12). Why is that?
3. How can believers help one another stand fast and hold firm to Scripture and orthodox tradition?
4. What is the grace of God, and why is it so necessary to help us keep from falling away or lapsing into lawlessness? How does the grace of God work in our lives?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this chapter? How are you working to implement that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.