

2Thessalonians 12-10-12a

This is Friday the 12th of October 2012, I think yesterday it was 10-11-12, so this is 10-12-12. And we're picking up our study in the book of 2 Thessalonians. We're at the end of chapter 2, we've come to verse 16, and as I mentioned last time there is wonderful doxology there that really summarizes the reason for which the information is being given to us.

And having just come from a prophecy conference today, I'm all full of eschatology, and since this is an eschatological passage, we have some resonance and some harmony with that. But ultimately it's practical, and my brother Dan asked me an interesting question as I was leaving today about the nature of these studies and the nature of the differing views of eschatology where you've got wonderfully erudite, educated, faithful, God-fearing men who come to vastly disparate views on prophecy. You've got your pre-mid and post-tribulational rapture guys, you've got your pre-mill, post-mill, ah-mill, historicist, preterist guys on the millennium, and when you listen to any one of them, they're compelling and they're earnest and they are well-versed in the scripture and it makes sense to them.

And you think, well, how can you start with one Bible and have all of these really terrific guys just drawing vastly different conclusions? It's an excellent question, one that is in fact, you know, minds run in the same ruts. I was sitting there thinking that same thing because I admired the cogency of the presentations. So we'll get into that a little bit as we review our passage and look at this concluding doxology by Paul before he dives into his finally brethren in chapter 3. But we'll begin as we always do by going to the Lord in prayer.

Father, it is such a comfort and encouragement to recognize every time we come before you the privilege that has been granted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ through His faithfulness, His obedience, His love for us, His work on the cross, and His existence as one of us in His first coming to secure for us this so great salvation. We thank you for the standing we have before you in Him. We thank you for all of the riches and blessings and potentials and promises and grants that are ours.

We thank you most of all that we can claim sonship and claim to be your children, not just your people, not just your servants, but we are personally related to you through the Lord Jesus Christ. What an incredible gift, and we're so thankful for that. We're thankful that as your children you have not left us appearing as orphans.

You have left us copious ways of coming into your presence and of learning about you and understanding your plan and purpose, the family that we're in, the mission that we are on, the calling that is ours. We thank you for this passage and the light that it sheds on those issues, and we pray that as we reflect on these words, as we study them together, that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate our hearts, help us to not only have an understanding of the meaning, but also of the purpose and the application personally and individually and in our lives with each other in this

world and before you. We look forward so enthusiastically to the day when you will announce to the Lord Jesus that it is time for Him to return for us.

We pray that our fellowship and our study and our diligent attention to these things will prepare us for that day so that we can continue to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus and serve Him and you in the ages to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, you'll remember here these people in Thessalonica got a lot of pressure. They've got the normal slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, complicated by active persecution on the part of believers in God who misunderstand God's current plan and purpose. They think God is still operating under the law.

They think God is still revealing Himself through Israel and through the synagogue, through the Moses and Elijah sort of witness that you get when you go to the synagogue. They have missed the significance of the coming of Jesus Christ. They have not seen the signs of the times.

They are comfortable and secure in the traditions that have been handed down, and this new innovation just doesn't seem right to them. And we say, well, can these be faithful individuals who just kind of missed it? They didn't get a right presentation. It struck them wrong.

Paul should have approached it a different way, been a little bit more humble, had more tact, found a different way to approach them. Could he have pitched it better? Could he have spun it better? Could he have appealed to them on a different basis and somehow got them on board? But he came in, and he's the apostle Paul, and he's brusque and forceful and alienated them somehow, and they just missed it. Is this why they missed it? Well, we've just seen in our preceding context why they missed it, and you remember this gift of new relationship with God through Christ, and this is an interesting period of transition where you can be an Old Testament believer.

You can reject Christ. You're still saved, but you didn't get the chance to jump the dispensational line, and it is similar to what happens to someone who is saved today but misses the call, misses the opportunity, misses the provision, and all of the things that we are supposed to be doing here and attaches to some weird human variant of Christianity. I'm thinking Catholicism, legalistic forms of Christianity, emotional forms of Christianity, where, yes, if you ask them, do you believe the Lord Jesus Christ died for your sins? Is that the basis on which you're going to go into the eternal future? They would say, oh, yes, absolutely.

But I also believe, and then they've got this whole ox cart full of wood, hay, and stubble that they're lugging around, touting as the plan of God. Well, it's a similar thing. It's just that the point of faith was before the gospel of Christ, so they're an Old Testament saint, and it isn't like you could lose your Old Testament salvation by not recognizing Jesus Christ.

They're blind. You don't blame a blind guy for not reading a sign. Now, if he blinded himself, you

can blame him for being blind, but you don't blame him for not following the instructions on the sign.

You blame him for blinding himself so that he can't. And without going into great detail, that's the reason that Old Testament saints who rejected Christ are not necessarily hellbound. They're responsible for blinding themselves so that they could not see the Lord Jesus.

But it's their blindness that is the issue. They believe in God. Paul talks about this in Romans 9, that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

Why no knowledge? Because they have blinded themselves to that knowledge. They've attached themselves. Well, believers in this day and age do the same thing.

So, when you look at what we covered last time, the coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who are perishing. And when you review this whole section, we've seen this many times. I'm just going to give it one more lick.

I'm going to bang this washpot one more time before we leave. When you look at, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind, troubled, as though Christ had already come. Let no one deceive you by any means.

It starts out with, let no one deceive you. People are going to be deceived at the end. You should not be deceived.

You and I should not be deceived. By any means, for that day will not come unless the standing away comes first. Now, that's critical.

Let's pretend like that wasn't in the passage. Let no one trouble you. Let no one deceive you by any means.

For the man of sin will come and be revealed, the son of perdition who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God. That's what's going to happen. Don't be troubled.

Don't be deceived because the man of lawlessness is coming. The son of perdition is coming. But don't be troubled.

Don't be deceived. But let me just tell you, this guy is coming and he's like nothing the world has ever seen. He's going to elevate himself above all that is called God, everything that's worshipped.

He'll sit as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember when I was with you, I told you these things, and now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own season. What? What have you said that restrains him? If you leave out, that

day can't come unless there comes first the standing away.

What is Paul? What is the referent? What is the antecedent? When he says now, now you recall now, now you remember what it is that restrains him. What's restraining him? The rebellion, the rebellion hasn't come yet. The lack of a rebellion is what's restraining him.

That doesn't make any sense. That's how apostasy is often translated. That day will not come unless there comes first the rebellion.

Well, now you know what's holding him back. He hasn't got a rebellion to lead. Well, that just doesn't make any sense.

What restrains him? And as you go on down, now you know what it is that restrains him, that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness, the hidden thing of lawlessness is already at work. Lawlessness is at work now.

So why isn't there a rebellion? If lawlessness is already at work, well, what's stopping the rebellion? Well, because it's not a rebellion. If the mystery is already at work, only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Where have we had any reference in the preceding context to something being taken out of the way? Now you know what restrains.

There is a he that is restraining and he's going to continue to restrain the mystery of lawlessness until he is taken out of the way. Taken out of the way when? Gee, Paul, you didn't mention that. Unless apostasia, standing away, the people who are the temple of the Holy Spirit leave.

So I'm just saying, if you try to turn this passage into any other interpretation, it's just fraught with all kinds of non-sensical things. If the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. That's your classic rule.

And the plain sense is, why should you be troubled? Don't let anybody shake you up. They can't come unless you're gone. The standing away must come first.

You're being here and then you're not here. You were here and then you left. This is what rebels are.

They used to be compliant and obedient, and now they're not. This is what mutineers are. They used to be part of the system, and now they're not.

Well, the apostasia, people that used to be in the world, are not. So that's my, I promise that's the last time I'll go back through that, but it just seems so emphatically, bleedingly clear to me that I do not understand how it has gotten twisted into another understanding. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, power, signs, lying wonders, lying wonders, pseudo wonders, pseudo terratas, remember that? Terras, the miracles, and that reminds me of the Egyptians with their snakes.

It's a lying wonder. Somebody was talking about, they've actually seen a documentary where in Egypt today, they've got these snakes, and if you hold them a certain way, they kind of go rigid and stiff, and they look like a stick. When you turn loose of them, why, they start wiggling around again.

When you pick them back up and pinch them on the head just right, they go stiff. I don't know if it's like rubbing a crocodile on his tummy or what, but you hold them, and you could fake this. It's a lying wonder.

Did Satan actually turn a stick into a serpent? No. Satan has never turned a stick into a serpent. Now, has God ever taken a serpent and removed his legs? Yes.

God can do miraculous things. Satan can only imitate miraculous things. The most he can do, the most impressive thing we've seen Satan do is organize havoc or direct havoc, point havoc at somebody.

You think about Job. He incited the Sabaeans to steal the camels. He was able to afflict Job with a skin disease that was of horrific consequence, but has Satan raised anybody from the dead? Has Satan given anybody a great gift and talent whereby he was able to feed the multitudes the way Joseph did in Egypt? Has he been able to grant wisdom and power so that someone was a great benefactor to the human race and was able to bring peace and prosperity and good fortune? When you look at the works of Satan, people think it's going to be great.

It's kind of like an election year. Guys talk a great fight. Oh, when we come in, there will be a chicken in every pot.

There's going to be a rainbow in every sky. Every day will be a holiday. Every meal will be a feast.

I will change the climate of the entire country to that of Southern California. Everybody will have a Malibu beach in their backyard. Everyone will walk around in flip-flops and be listening to Jimmy Buffett.

It's all going to be great. It's all going to be wonderful. The most that will happen is you might step on a pop-top and have to go put a Band-Aid on your foot.

That's the worst. It will just be wonderful. I'm bringing in the millennium.

And, of course, the promise always fails. The communists thought, the socialists thought, the fascists thought. Everybody thought, if I can just get power, I'll fix this problem.

I've just got to get rid of the property owners. I've got to murder, you know, a couple tens of thousands of people, and then it'll all be great. And this is the foundation on which these bloody empires are built is murder and redistribution of wealth and somebody's idea of what will make it

great.

Well, this is satanic. It's the satanic lie. He was a liar from the beginning.

He's the author of the very first lie. Hath God not said? He knows when you eat the fruit, you'll be like Him. What's Satan's great dream? I will be like the Most High.

What does he pitch to other people? Do what I'm suggesting, and you'll be like the Most High. And it's a falsehood. It's a lying wonder.

It is a deception. Paul says at the very beginning, do not let anyone deceive you. Don't let anyone fool you.

So the deception is going to prevail among those who are perishing. Why? Because they did not receive the love of the truth, the love that is embodied in the truth, the love that is communicated in the truth, the love of God that is reflected in the truth. What's the one verse everybody knows? If they know a single verse in the Bible, what verse do people know? John 3.16. What is the truth? What is the agape? God so loved the world.

That's the truth, and they push it away. Anybody that you talk with in the secular, humanist, godless, abominated world, what do they reject? This whole notion of a God that's bigger than I am. I reject that.

I refuse it. If I'm going to talk about a God, I'll talk about the flying spaghetti monster, and I'll mock the very notion that there could be a God greater than me. I am like the most high.

I, captain of my ship, master my fate, etc. So, because they did not... Why are they perishing? Because they pushed away. Ap ek dekomai.

Remember? They're not lombanoing. They're not failing to receive. They're pushing it away, that they might be delivered.

Otherwise, they would be saved if they didn't do this pushing away. Same thing in Romans 1. They suppress the truth in unrighteousness. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion.

Note the order. Because they have pushed away the love that is communicated in the truth, even though they're perishing, they could have been saved, and because they didn't want to be saved, and they pushed away this truth, for this reason, God sends delusion. God does not send delusion first so that they cannot see the light and cannot be saved.

This would be Galvanism. This would be your Reformed theology. This would be your predestination.

They were not foreloved. They were not foreknown. And therefore, they are... By the way, if that

view were true, why would God have to send a delusion? If you're predestined to not have any illumination of the Spirit and not any salvation, who needs to send you delusion? You're hopelessly deluded to begin with.

But if God has cleared all of that away, if God the Holy Spirit has come and has completely balanced all of the factors, has made a completely level table, you put a ball bearing on that table, frictionless surface, it still doesn't roll. Everything is even. Everything is balanced.

The only determining factor is your choice. And you say, I push that thing right off the table. I push it away.

Get away from me. Now what's going to happen? Well, that clarity, that view, that honest moment of appraisal, that ministry of grace of God's Holy Spirit is going to be replaced. So you don't want the truth? You reject the love that is communicated in the truth? All right.

God is not going to stand there all day long and hold out His hands to disobedient, stiff-necked people because these are unsafe people. He's got no covenant relationship with them. He says, you don't want the truth? You want a lie? Here's a lie.

I'll give you a lie. Here's a real good lie. Remember up in heaven, God said, which of the angels will go down and fool his king? The king doesn't want the truth.

He wants lies. Which of y'all will deliver him a really good lie? Okay, I'll go. God's not stupid, and it is stupid to continue to appeal to someone who has made it extremely clear they don't like you or the horse you rode in on.

So, for this reason, God will send them strong delusion. There is a reason why these people end up deluded. They chose it.

They chose delusion. They chose to push away the truth. It's extremely important to understand this.

This is one of your bedrock passages that helps. When you get to passages that are less clear, what do you do? When there's a fog and you can't see detail, what do you do? You look for the big things. You look for the fixed objects.

Can I see the edges of the road? Can I see a telephone pole? Can I see a bridge abutment? Okay, I'll guide on that. I can't see maybe every mark on the highway, but I can see the big things. This is one of the big things.

This guides us, keeps us from smashing. In order that they should believe the lie. It isn't God's will that people believe a lie.

It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Paul says, I

beseech you, don't be deceived. I don't want you to be deceived.

But people who refuse the truth, God is going to let them be deceived. They will believe the lie. In order that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth.

They will be condemned who believed not the truth. They will be condemned in the future because they believe not the truth in the past. They're not condemned in the past so that they can't believe the truth in the future.

I mean, how many different ways does Paul make this clear? But they had pleasure in unrighteousness. I'm not pleased with God's love. I'm not pleased with the truth.

I like this whole unrighteous path. Fits my model of how things ought to be. But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for deliverance through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth.

Why did God choose them? Was this his inscrutable, immutable pre-creation will? He said, I'm imagining a population and I'm imagining a fraction of them that I'll save and the rest of them I won't. Why did God choose them for salvation through belief in the truth? Why did he choose them? Because when the love of the truth was presented, they embraced it in spite of their neighbors, in spite of the synagogue criers, in spite of the persecution, in spite of the opinions of their Greek culture neighbors. They heard it.

It made sense to them. They accepted it. They embraced it.

They took it into their bosom and they placed their faith in Jesus Christ. And he says, we give thanks for you. You're beloved by God because you put yourself in a place where God could choose you.

The choosing isn't the first act here. The first acts are in the preceding paragraph. Right? People want to put God's choosing ahead of everything else.

But Paul has already given us the trail of cause and effect here. God, from the beginning, from the beginning of what? From the beginning of when they heard the gospel. From the beginning of when they accepted and embraced the gospel.

Not the beginning of creation, not the beginning of God's plan for the human race. From the outset, Paul's first visit to Thessalonica, these people jumped on it. They welcomed it.

They had been pining. They said, you know, I know that this God of Israel is the true God and I can see these things. It appeals to me.

It makes sense to me. But there's something missing. Paul came and said, here's the culmination.

Here's the fruition. Here's the fulfillment and the aftermath of all of these things you've been learning in synagogue. And they said, yes, this is it.

It makes sense to me. Here's the truth. Here's the love of God fulfilled.

Here's the love of God broadened beyond the nation of Israel. I'm not a second-class citizen because I'm Greek. Wonderful.

Terrific. I embrace that. And he says, from the beginning, from the first time you heard it, God was able to save you.

God's been able to bless you and we thank God for you because you were receptive. Context. Context.

Context. The passages we heard today in the prophecy conference, excised from their context. Go into Isaiah chapter 2. Go into Isaiah chapter 11.

Go to Isaiah chapter 40. Go to Daniel chapter 12. Go to Revelation chapter 20.

Go to Acts and all these different places and lift these things bodily out of their context and say, look, this says day of the Lord and this says day of the Lord. So similarity means same. Things that are similar are not necessarily the same.

You can be similar without being the same. So, to which he called you, salvation through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth. What did Jesus tell the woman at the well up in Samaria? People are arguing about whether it's Jerusalem or up here.

There's a day coming when those who worship God, it isn't going to matter what the geography is, how will they worship him? In spirit and in truth. God chose you for sanctification through the work of the spirit and belief in the truth. This is how you are now worshiping God.

You're not stuck with the old paradigm that has been superseded out of the law at the synagogue. We thank God for you. You saw it.

You recognized it. You embraced it and God was able. You are now part of the chosen.

You are electing him before the foundation of the world. Jesus was chosen before the foundation of the world. To which he called you by our gospel.

That's the beginning that he's talking about. What is the context? From the beginning. When you were called by our gospel, you jumped on it.

You grabbed it. You didn't push it away. You tackled it.

You grabbed hold of it and wouldn't let go. You're like Jacob wrestling with the man all night. I will

not let you go until you bless me.

We thank God for you. We thank God for your tenacity, your perseverance under persecution. You recognize the value of this.

You are impressed with the grace of God reflected in his love through Christ. You're sticking to it. We thank God for you.

We thank God for that. For the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of this.

What is the purpose? Did Paul write 2 Thessalonians 2 because eschatology is fun? Prophecy is a blast. You'll get a kick out of this. Let me tell you what's coming up.

I know you're probably getting a little bored with the whole practical love one another stuff. So let me give you a thrill. Let me tell you some hidden things that are to come.

Is that why he wrote chapter 2? Why did he write it? Don't be troubled. Don't be shaken. This is an anchor.

This is another one of those fixed objects. When things get a little foggy, this is what you remember. Where are we headed? What is this for? The Lord Jesus is coming back.

The persecution you have now is in God's hands. It is managed. The people saying, Oh, this is just the beginning.

It's going to get worse and worse. And the Antichrist is going to be all over you. No, you won't be here for that.

Don't be shaken in mind. As of the day of the Lord is coming. And this is some judgment on you.

This is God's challenge so that you can grow, so that you can express faith, so that you can persevere, so that you can exercise your sanctification and belief in the truth. That's why you have these challenges. Don't let somebody spook you and panic you that this is some other kind of suffering, that this is some magnum opus Antichrist thing happening.

Don't be deceived. Don't be shaken. Don't be troubled.

So this is what you might call practical eschatology, isn't it? This is make application today eschatology. Now, does it have that value for us? Absolutely. Is the mystery of lawlessness currently at work? Nothing like an election year to see the mystery of lawlessness.

Nothing like an election year. Nothing like listening to speeches where people are just, you want to talk about, brethren, be not deceived. Let no one shake you up with predictions of, you know, if you all don't get out of the way, all Hades is going to break loose in the economy and in the job

market and this and that, and it's all going to come to pieces.

No, it isn't. This world isn't going to really unravel until the man of lawlessness is in charge and we will not be here. So don't be shaken.

Don't be troubled because everything is suppressed. Everything is held in check. Evil is not going to get too evil.

Bad is not going to get too bad as long as God's people who formed the temple of God's Holy Spirit are on the planet. Greater is he that is where? In you. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

What's going to be the problem when he that is in you, if you leave, he that is in you leaves. Now who's greater? He that is in the world. And people who are still in the world, when he that is in the world becomes the greatest, that's a day I don't want to be here for.

Nobody should want to be here for. But greater is he that is in you. So be not soon shaken or troubled in mind.

Don't be deceived. That day when he that is in the world is going to prevail will never come so long as we're here, so long as he that is in you is here. So comfort one another with these words.

Be thankful. And we get to verse 16. Actually verse 15.

Therefore, brethren, therefore. What is chapter 2, therefore? This is what it's there for. Therefore, brethren.

It doesn't say therefore people of Achaia or people of Macedonia or people of Greece, people of Hellas, people of, you know, southern Europe. What does it say? Therefore, brethren, brothers, you who are body and bride of Christ, family of God, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or letter. Remember the three things he began with? Don't be shaken by.

There was three things, wasn't there? Not by word or epistle or anuma, sort of a smelly breeze blowing through. Somebody opened a window and a dog chased a skunk outside or something. It's just this off-putting breeze, some windy rumor.

Well, notice he says, hold fast the traditions that have come by word and by epistle. The teaching doesn't come by rumor. It doesn't come by weird suggestions.

It doesn't come by third hand. Well, you know what I heard? You know what I saw in a blog? You know what I saw as a comment underneath an article after the big news event? That's not the source of our truth. Word or epistle.

This is sanctification of the spirit and belief in the truth. The truth. In contradistinction to, opposed

to, deception.

How many times does the Bible tell us, don't be deceived? I would not have you ignorant, brethren. Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

Be not deceived. It's a command of scripture. We have a marching order.

Don't be fooled. Don't be deceived. Well, the worst deception is self-deception.

And the Bible talks about that. So be not deceived. Brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions.

Now we're going to pause and take our break. When we come back, here's my question. Maybe you can form your own version of an answer to this.

He says, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle. He's talking about what he has presented to them, right? Tradition here kind of goes back to the teaching model that has been prevalent for centuries in someone who knows, teaches those who don't. There's the Socratic model or whatever you want to call it.

You've got a rabbi, and you've got people who listen to the rabbi. You've got someone standing up presenting the word of God, and you've got people listening. This is the model.

It is presented. It is delivered. It is taught.

It is exemplified. It is amplified. It is coached and encouraged, and there's exhortation and encouragement involved in it.

So that's tradition. Tradition is handed down from generation to generation, from faith to faith, from father to son, from teacher to student, from those who know it and have learned it and have lived it to those who are needing to know it and needing to learn it and needing to live it. Those are the traditions.

It doesn't mean, well, we have a tradition that any new person has to turn their hat around backwards and squawk like a duck. I mean, you know, there's people that have initiation traditions or, well, traditionally we do this. You know, traditionally when you get promoted, we drop your bars in the bottom of a pitcher of beer and you've got to drink your way down.

But not that kind of tradition. This is tradition that preserves and communicates and passes down verified truth, truth of God. So here's my question.

What are these traditions? So he says, hold them fast, stick with it. This is what's going to be your bulwark against deception and instability and being troubled and so on. Hold fast.

Well, what are these traditions? Because Paul doesn't give them in this letter. He says, don't you remember when I was with you I told you these things. Well, that kind of leaves us out.

We weren't there. So what are these traditions? Well, when we come back, we'll find out.