

Salvation: Here A Little; There A Little

The Strong Delusion Sent From God

Introduction

In our studies, we have endeavored to make sense and to fully understand what are often labeled as the “hard-to-understand” passages of scripture. As we have discovered, areas that take careful study to grasp often contain much needed teachings for our life. In this lesson we discuss what is to many a “troubling” principle of God’s Word that is mentioned in two of the Apostle Paul’s writings:

2 Thess 2:9-12 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The entire book of 2 Thessalonians is about the last days before Christ’s return. The first chapter of the book is spent encouraging believers in handling the persecution that will grow in the last days. In the second chapter, Paul begins to teach about the coming of the Lord and what must take place before Christ’s return. After giving information about the working of the spirit of the Antichrist and of the Antichrist, himself, Paul gives what is probably the strongest warning of the book: that in the last days some people would be sent a strong delusion by God so that they could believe a lie and be condemned.

Paul mentions a similar point in the first chapter of the letter to the churches at Rome:

Rom 1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

In this case, God gave them “a debased mind,” and allowed them to believe that they were right in their false thinking. Such passages lead rise to some questions that we will endeavor to answer: first, what exactly is the “strong delusion” sent by God?; second, what did these people do to cause God to send this delusion?; third, how or why could a holy and perfect God send a spirit of delusion to people that caused them to be lost? If we are in the last days before Christ’s return, then we should be able to readily see examples of people who have received this delusion today.

Foundational Thoughts

We must remember that God is always bound to His Word and that God cannot lie¹. The Bible contains some prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled but before time ends, all will have taken place as God said it would. This is a positive teaching for believers today because if God has made you a promise that has not yet come to pass, then know that it will, for God cannot lie! God’s Word is sure and so are His promises!

When we consider the sureness of God’s Word, though, we must also realize that there is a negative sense to that principle, also. Because just as God will keep His promises that He has made to those who trust Him and believe Him and love Him, then so will He keep the promises that He has made to punish sin and reward wickedness. This is why we must strive to apply all of God’s Word to every area of our life. This is why we must never quench the working of the Holy Spirit by not allowing it to continually change our lives. This is also why we must get power over our sinful lifestyles and not continue in sin simply because we know that forgiveness is possible, because the Bible clearly states that a sinful lifestyle will not enter into eternal life². If we do fall and sin, we must be quick to repent and find a place of restoration at the feet of Jesus Christ as we have recently discussed in these studies.

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See Numbers 23:19.

² See Revelation 21:27.

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Because God will keep His promises about unrepented sin and deliberate sinful lifestyles not entering into eternal life.

The Bible teaches us that the Word of the Lord is a “two-edged sword.”³ Every promise in the Bible is both a blessing to those who obey and a curse to those who do not. One specific example of this “double-edgedness” will help us better understand our subject:

Ps 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Ps 145:16 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

These are great promises for those who trust in and desire to know God! He will give you the desires of your heart. He will satisfy the desire of every living thing. God will not only supply all of our needs, but wants as a good Father to give us what we desire also! When we pray, God hears us and blesses us accordingly and so there is definitely a positive edge to this promise: because how exciting it is living for God when we realize that He will give us power over sin, and blessings, miracles, and gifts when we desire for His will to be done and enjoy living for Him!

The flip side of this promise is that sometimes people desire something that is not God's will. Some people become consumed by one thing and that one thing becomes their heart's desire and they pray and God repeatedly to fulfill their one burning desire, but do not sincerely pray whether or not it is God's will. God finally gives them the desires of their heart and so fulfills His Word but when they get it, the person eventually realizes that what they wanted was not necessarily what they needed.

By example, I have many times known people to pray for a job that would allow them to move to such and such city and they desired it because they wanted it for whatever reasons. And they prayed and prayed and begged and became obsessed with the thought of moving to a particular city. And finally, even though it was not God's perfect will for it to happen, God finally responded to their heart's cry and opened the door and let it happen and they got what seemed to be a great job and in the place that they wanted and yet they move there and everything falls apart and the job is not what it seemed to be and the place is not as happy as they thought and they are dying spiritually and they want to know, “why did God allow this door to open?” The answer is simply that He is bound to His Word and so He fulfilled their heart's desire although what they wanted was not the best for them. Their own persistence caused God to obey His Word and act.

This is why the Apostle James wrote:

James 4:13-15 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." NIV

In everything that we do, particularly in life decisions of a lasting effect, we must take care to pray for the will of God. It is in this context that the much-quoted scripture is found:

James 4:17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

In context, James is talking about the sin of leaving God out of your plans. People abuse and misuse this verse of scripture, but it is specifically talking about people praying for their will and their desire and not praying according to God's will. When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He taught that they were never to make one request and one petition until they had prayed for God to have His will on earth and in their lives⁴.

The only thing more frustrating than being out of God's perfect will is to be there because you prayed it on yourself!

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See Hebrews 4:12.

⁴ See Luke 11:1-2.

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There are some things that are always God's will and for which we only need to pray for God to help us to submit and do them. You never have to pray about whether it is God's will for you to follow the plan of salvation and repent, be baptized in the name of Jesus, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is God's will that nobody would perish and that all would come to eternal life⁵. Likewise, you never have to pray if it is God's will for you to: forgive someone, stop sinning, love your neighbor, come to church, worship, etcetera. But in other areas of life – particularly in the areas of future plans and goals – we must be careful to desire God's perfect will in our life. The only thing more frustrating than being out of God's will is being there because you prayed it on yourself! God will satisfy the desires of our heart, therefore we must make sure that we desire His perfect will, whatever that may be, more than anything else!

The Strong Delusion

Keeping all of these foundational principles in mind, let us return to our first scripture and examine it more closely:

2 Thess 2:9-12 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The first thing that must be noticed is that those who received this strong delusion, did so because “they refused to love the truth and be saved.” Secondly, they “did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” The two elements that led to these people receiving a delusion is that they refused to love the truth about salvation and that they wanted someone to tell them that they could live as they desired and be alright.

When Jesus was in trial before His crucifixion, Pilate asked Jesus if He were a king and Jesus responded that He had come into the world for truth and that, “every one that loves truth hears my voice.”⁶ Pilate responded by asking a question: “what is truth?” and then walked away before he could receive an answer. Pilate knew what the truth was but the issue was that to admit that Jesus was Messiah would have cost Pilate his political power and position. And so Pilate did not want to love or receive the truth because it would have inconvenienced him and caused him to have to do things that would cause him to abandon his selfish desires and dreams. Therefore Pilate gave into the life of the Jewish religious leaders because the truth would have caused him to have to change much in his life.

John 17:17 states that God's Word is truth. Not just part of it, but all of it. As we noted in the very first lesson of this series, God's Word is built so that principles and precepts are “here a little and there a little.” We have truth when we take all of what God's Word has to say on a subject. We reject truth when we want to cling to one scripture but ignore many others that add to the subject matter. Unfortunately that is exactly what many Christians do, particularly in the subject of what a person must do to be saved. There are many verses that command many different things as part of our being saved and we need all of them! But some people only want to take two or three and ignore all of the rest. For example, we must absolutely believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior to be saved, but we must also repent of our sins. But we must also be baptized in water in the name of Jesus. But we must also receive the Holy Spirit and we must also let it continue to work in our lives. We must also produce the fruit of the Spirit. We must also endure to the end. We must be holy because He is holy and we could go on and on. Which of these things are necessary for salvation? All of them! All of God's Word is truth!

All of this becomes a matter of direction. If a person is coming forward and desiring to know God in all truth, then when confronted with a new scriptural commandment, they will act in faith and believe it. For example, many people lived faithfully for God at the level of initial belief and repentance, but either through personal study or teaching, when they realized that they needed to be baptized in both the water and the Spirit, they acted in faith and kept moving forward in God. To such people who are seeking truth, the first steps were essential and just a part of the path to guide them toward all truth. They loved truth and so when given more of it, they embraced it and kept moving forward in God. Such were my parents. Such were many of the people in our church. This is the proper response and the right way – keep moving forward in God and embrace all that the Word of God teaches in every area!

⁵ See 2 Peter 3:9.

⁶ See John 18.

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But if a person has known the commandment of scripture in an area and even possibly obeyed it and yet decides to go the other direction and embrace less of the truth and ignore some of the scriptural commands, then they are heading the wrong way – away from truth. And unfortunately there are many who have taken this path. They do not want to hear the complete truth of God's Word and are not hungry for it because it would require them to swallow their pride or change from man-made religious traditions or would cause them to have to give up a sinful lifestyle. When such people refuse to receive a love for the truth and keep going deeper in God, they place themselves in danger of receiving a strong delusion from God. That is, if they refuse to believe truth and become very adamant about it, God will let them do so! This does not mean that they are saved but rather that they have deluded themselves by rejecting the truth of God's complete Word! And they live for God in the delusion. Because God will give people the desires of their heart and so if they reject the truth and desire that it not be true, then God will give them over to the delusion that it is that way. They are sincere in their misguided belief but sincerely wrong.

A Pertinent Old Testament Example

There is an Old Testament passage which helps shed light on this process. The story is of King Ahab of old and the prophet Micaiah. This is another one of those passages that bothers people because God causes him to believe a lie, but understanding this story is very vital to our subject at hand:

The story is found in the 22nd chapter of 1 Kings and to understand it thoroughly, we must realize that King Ahab had repeatedly rejected God throughout His reign over Israel. God had sent the prophet Elijah to rebuke his sin and yet Ahab had still followed the evil advice of his ungodly wife, Jezebel. Ahab had gone as far as to pass a law that if anyone worshiped the true God of Israel, they would be put to death and that all of the Israelites had to instead worship the idol of Baal. Because of his blatant sinfulness and false repenting, God rejected Ahab completely and allowed him to believe whatever he wanted to believe.

In the story, Ahab wanted to go to war and wanted badly for it to be God's will, so he called all of the false prophets and prophets of idols and asked them what they thought. They all prophesied exactly what Ahab wanted to hear, that God would be with him and that he would get sure victory. King Ahab wanted the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, to go into war with him and Jehoshaphat still had some respect for the true God of Israel and was doubtful of all of the prophesies of the prophets of Baal. And so we find this exchange:

1 Kings 22:7-8 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here another prophet of the LORD of whom we may inquire?" 8 And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

King Ahab "hated" Micaiah because he was a true prophet of God and as Ahab lived his life beyond and against the Word of God, Micaiah always had something negative to say about it. It was not that Micaiah hated Ahab, but that Ahab's life was impossible for God to bless. If you always think that the man of God has something negative to say to you, then perhaps you need to change your lifestyle to match the blessings of God!

In the story, a servant was sent to fetch Micaiah and forewarned him that all of the other prophets had prophesied good things to the king. When Micaiah came in to the throne room, he very sarcastically gave a glowing prophecy of victory at which King Ahab became enraged and demanded that the prophet tell the truth. King Ahab obviously knew that it was not God's will for him to engage in this war in the first place for him to make such a statement and so his seeking of the many false prophet's advice was proof that he knew in his heart the truth of the matter. The problem was that Ahab did not want the truth because the truth went against what he wanted it to be.

I have known many people today to do the same as King Ahab of old did. They want to do something desperately and know in the back of their mind that it is not right. And so they come to the man of God in their life, their pastor, and ask what he thinks and then when he tells them the truth, they go find someone else who is a preacher and ask their opinion and then another and another. When really their seeking many opinions in the matter is proof that they know that what the first man of God said was true but the truth is not what they wanted to hear!

This attitude of Ahab is the attitude of many religious people today, also. They judge a church and a minister by whether or not they agree with what he is saying and not whether or not what he is saying agrees with the Word of

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God. If the minister preaches a part of the Word that they would rather ignore, then they go find another church or another minister that will tell them what they want to hear. But as in Ahab's day, just because you ignore the truth, does not change the truth of God's Word! And just because you can find a minister that tells you what you want to hear does not mean that God's Word has changed! The truth is still the truth. Such people are setting themselves up for a strong delusion and for being eternally lost!

In the story, Micaiah tells King Ahab the truth and relays a vision that he has seen of what has transpired recently in heaven. Here are the exact words of the prophet:

1 Kings 22:19-23 And Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; 20 and the LORD said, 'Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' And one said one thing, and another said another. 21 Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD, saying, 'I will entice him.' 22 And the LORD said to him, 'By what means?' And he said, 'I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And he said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.' 23 Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you."

This scene is very similar to that of the first chapter of the book of Job in that we learn that evil spirits have access to heaven and often appear there with the other angels. We also learn that God can even use evil spirits for His purpose. In Micaiah's vision, God asked which spirit would go and convince Ahab to go into battle against God's perfect will so that Ahab would be killed according to the former prophecy of the prophet Elijah. The Bible says that an evil spirit – specifically a lying spirit – came and volunteered to God that he would be the one to go and convince Ahab's prophets to tell him that it was God's will to go an battle. And God then gave this lying spirit a charge to do as he had spoken!

From this we learn that God is much more in control of things than we tend to realize and we must notice that the lying spirit was *from the Lord*, but not *of the Lord*. God sent the lying spirit but it was not the Holy Spirit doing a godly work. Furthermore, the reasons that God allowed the lying spirit to go forth and do as bidden was because of the evil desires of Ahab's heart in rejecting truth.

Did the false prophets really feel a spirit upon them speaking through them? Yes, but it was the lying spirit. Was the spirit sent by God? Yes, but it was a lying spirit that was not of God. They felt a spiritual presence when they prayed and prophesied, but the spiritual presence and unction was not that of the Holy Spirit, but of a lying spirit because these men had rejected the truth of God's Word! And so God sent a delusion – a spirit from the direction of God but not of God. And God sent it to fulfill their heart's desire that refused to believe truth.

There are many religious movements today that parade under the banner of Christianity and yet reject the fundamental truths of the Bible such as the true identity of Jesus Christ as God and Jesus' name baptism and the need for a holy lifestyle that is separated from the world. Some do so out of ignorance of Apostolic truth, but others reject the truth of the Bible by purposefully ignoring scriptures that contradict their opinion and desire. There is an extreme danger to such a stance because if God's Word is not the governing factor of our lives, then we open ourselves to desires that are not according to God's will. In other words, *if a person wants to believe something bad enough, God will let them and if that person repeatedly rejects truth, God will give them over to a strong delusion*. They will feel a spiritual presence that has been sent from the Lord, and they will even hear a message from the Lord, but it is a strong delusion of a lying spirit because they did not love truth. The delusion is from God but not of God. And Paul said it comes that they "may be condemned" who chose to believe what is false.

In the Old Testament example of the 22nd chapter of 1 Kings, the true word of God from Micaiah came true. Ahab believed the lie and went into battle and was killed just as Micaiah and Elijah had said would happen. Just because Ahab sincerely believed the lie did not change the fact that it was a lie. His prophets were sincere but sincerely wrong!

The lying spirit is sent from the Lord but not the Spirit of the Lord; the delusion is from God but not of God!

Be cautious of people who are anointed of God and even used of God and yet do not preach the whole truth of Biblical teaching – particularly in areas of salvation. It could be that they direction wise are coming toward truth and

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just need further instruction. But it could also be that they are rejecting truth and ignoring it and seeking for what they desire to be truth and not all of what God has said. If this latter case is correct, then it is dangerous to associate with such people. Because it is possible that they have a spirit from God but not of God and that they have been sent a strong delusion. We must love truth!

The Journey to a Debased Mind

The Apostle Paul talked about people that had received such a delusion from God even in his day. Notice how the progression of the people that the Apostle described in the 1st chapter of Romans parallels what we have learned about strong delusion:

Rom 1:21-22 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,

These were a people who once knew God but refused to glorify Him as God. Their rejection in this case was of the truth that God alone is to be glorified and thanked and praised. Because of their rejection of this truth, their hearts were darkened and they became fools.

Rom 1:23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Instead of worshipping God directly, they began to worship idols and images that supposedly represented God. Idolatry in religion is always a step associated with the rejection of truth!

Rom 1:24-25 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Because they rejected true worship, God “gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” That is, He allowed them to believe what they wanted to believe although it was a lie. They began to “dishonor their bodies among themselves,” a reference to sexual sins. Sexual sins are the next step down the ladder of the rejection of truth.

Rom 1:26-27 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

The next step to this road to depravity was the rise of homosexual acts. And finally they were so caught up in their delusion that the Bible says:

Rom 1:28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

God gave them up to a “debased mind.” The KJV word is “reprobate” and the idea in the Greek here is that of being “castaway” or “rejected and worthless.” God let them believe whatever they wanted to believe was right and let them feel justified in their actions. They justified their sexual sins and homosexual behavior. They justified their worship of idols. They, in the name of religion and god, propagated their personal opinions and lived openly in sin as if it were okay. But they were debased and had been given over to a strong delusion because they rejected the truth of who God is and how He wants to be worshipped! And the scripture continues:

Rom 1:29-31 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

Is this not a portrait of our society in which we live? Why is this so? Because we live in a society that has largely rejected truth and in doing so have believed a lie and God has let them to give them the desires of their heart! Not

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only is this a portrait of our society but is a perfect representation of the path taken by many a religious movement. Because they rejected truth in some way, they have passed down the path of degradation to becoming castaways from truth. They have a spirit from God on them, but it is not the Spirit of God! I want the pure, Holy Spirit of truth to operate in my life! Therefore I must heed all of God's Word and not just believe what I want to believe! Society may have followed such a path as the Apostle Paul outlined in Romans and many religious denominations may have followed suit, but I do not want to go down such a path in my own personal life! We must love truth!

Conclusion

To summarize, if people do not love truth and want to live differently from the Word of God yet try to seek a relationship with God under those conditions, they open themselves up to deception and can even go as far as to receive a lying spirit that will tell them what they want to hear. God will eventually give such a person the desires of their heart, but one day in judgment, it may be that they realize that they did not really want what they desired! Let us seek to know Him and worship Him in all truth! Let us be zealous to strive for accuracy in doctrinal teachings and not to ignore any facet of the scriptural teachings of any area.

I can do some things to ensure myself from ever being in danger of receiving a strong delusion from God: I must be open to the fullness of the teachings of the scriptures in every area. I must never reach a place where I no longer want to know more about what God has commanded or promised. I must never reach a place where I would rather ignore the clear teachings of scripture in one area simply because I do not want to change that area of my life. I must strive to base everything that I do and am on the Word of God and the principles of life found within it. I must listen to the man of God when he speaks what I need to hear and not just what I want to hear. I must love truth! If I will do these things, I will endure until the end and be saved!