

Message #6

II Thessalonians 2:1-3

I just recently read an interesting theological article. In the article the author said there are key foundational doctrines that are “locked in concrete” from which we should never budge: Trinity; Inspiration of Scripture; Depravity of man; Deity of Jesus Christ; the importance of the cross and the resurrection; the importance of salvation by grace and faith and not works; and Jesus will come again. We would certainly be quick to agree that all of these precious doctrines must be believed and defended.

However, after saying that, he started attacking the pre-Tribulation Rapture. He said the chronological events that lead to Christ’s return are debatable. He made his first mistake when he put the Church in the seal judgments of Revelation 6; and from there he wandered around and rambled confusing truth aimed at Israel with truth aimed at the Church, and in the end he warned the Church to get ready to go into the Tribulation.

One of the passages that he alluded to in his diatribe was II Thessalonians chapter 2. In the course of his article he said that he didn’t treat those who held to the pre-Tribulation as lepers. That is so comforting and so good to know, because we believe that any belief other than the pre-Tribulation Rapture is leprous. Not only do we believe that, but apparently so did the Apostle Paul. He wanted this Thessalonian church to be very precise in its belief about future events. In fact, what he requests in the opening three verses of chapter two is this:

PAUL MAKES AN APOSTOLIC REQUEST THAT THE CHURCH BE DOCTRINALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE CONCERNING BIBLICAL PROPHECY BECAUSE THERE ARE SERIOUS NEGATIVE RAMIFICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH THAT ISN’T.

Not many people and not many churches actually realize how dangerous it is to sit under faulty teaching. For many people, church is church and it really doesn’t matter what one believes or what one is taught, especially when it comes to Biblical prophecy. But this text certainly paints a whole different picture about church and about what is taught in the church.

One of the great values of knowing God’s Word and knowing doctrine is the ability to recognize false teaching. God wants His people very sound and stable in their doctrine and very knowledgeable of His Word. This is what will enable God’s people to spot false teaching and false teachers.

If ever there is a text that challenges believers in a church to carefully understand God’s Word, it is this one. What is even more significant here is that if one does not know biblical prophecy, one can be greatly and quickly deceived. Paul wanted these believers to understand, and as Dr. McGee said, “the day of the Lord has no reference to the church” (*II Thessalonians*, p. 412).

There are three main key observations we want to make concerning this:

OBSERVATION #1 – This is a request Paul is making to the church. **2:1a**

The thing that prompts Paul to make this request to the church is, as Dr. John Walvoord said, “the rise of false teaching in the Thessalonian church” (*I & II Thessalonians*, p. 119). Apparently some in the church were getting fuzzy in their doctrine, and at the heart of it was false teaching concerning the fact that their present problems meant they were in the Tribulation.

Notice the request is aimed at the “brothers,” which means this is aimed at the believers in the church. God wants His people stable and secure in their knowledge. The present tense of the verb “request” would indicate that this request is a continual request and not just a one time request.

So Paul is continually making a request for consistency in doctrine. God wants His Church solid and stable in what they believe. He wants them knowing what they believe and why they believe it.

By the way, this does tell us how to actually defend against false doctrine—use the written Scriptures and go for the jugger vein of it. Paul goes right after it and hits it head on. He doesn’t say they’ll figure it out one day; he tackles it straight up.

OBSERVATION #2 – This is a request specifically in the context of biblical prophecy. **2:1b**

Now the actual word translated “coming” is articular “the coming” and it refers to a specific moment when the Lord Jesus Christ comes to gather us and take us into His presence (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 347). The word “gather together” has a specific eschatological Church moment in mind, in which Grace Age believers are gathered together with the Lord Jesus Christ. **The specific moment is the Rapture.**

Notice carefully what the wording is—“in regard to the coming of the Lord and our gathering together with Him.” **Now the words “gathering-together-to-Him” is only used in two places in the N.T. and both of them are connected to the Church (Hebrews 10:25; II Thessalonians 2:1).**

In Hebrews 10:25 the believers are admonished not to forsake themselves from gathering together or from assembling ourselves together at church. Here in **II Thessalonians 2:1** it refers to a specific gathering together of Church Age brethren when the Lord Jesus Christ comes to gather them. **The actual moment when the Lord Jesus Christ will gather together His Church will be the Rapture.**

So this request that Paul is making is being made in view of the Rapture of the Church. Paul is requesting that God’s people be very precise in regard to their understanding of prophetic events as it relates to their specific gathering together to meet the Lord.

As Paul previously stated in his first letter to the Thessalonians, our gathering together with the Lord Jesus Christ will occur when Christ raptures His Church and we are caught up into the air to meet the Lord (I Thess. 4:17). We are not appointed to go into the time of wrath; we are promised the Rapture. The coming of the Lord is supposed to be a comforting blessed hope, not a scary Tribulation threat (I Thess. 4:18; 5:8).

It is specifically at the Rapture when all believers will be gathered together with the Lord, both those who have died in Christ and those who are alive on earth. This will be the moment of corporate gathering for the Church.

So we may actually conclude from this very context, that God does not want his Church fuzzy when it comes to the Rapture as it specifically relates to the Tribulation, Antichrist and Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Paul wants God's Church very precise in their knowledge of these things.

This goes directly against the teaching found in many churches that says it really doesn't matter what you believe about prophecy. It is important that we do understand it.

Near the end of the first century, almost 50 years after Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation. In the opening words of the book, John specifically identifies the book as being the "revelation" singular, not "revelations" plural. What that means is that the entire book of "Revelation" is one prophetic revelation that God expects His people to know. He expects them to understand distinct truth about the Church Age and the Rapture, the Tribulation and the Antichrist, the Second Coming and the Millennium.

OBSERVATION #3 – This request about being precise in biblical prophecy is for specific purposes. **2:2-3**

There are at least six purposes that Paul presents that are critical to being very precise in our grasp of prophetic doctrine.

Purpose #1 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents a believer from having his composure quickly shaken. **2:2a**

Make no mistake about this point; false teaching that attacks the pre-Tribulation Rapture will leave you very insecure. In fact, the word "shaken" (σαλευω) is one that actually means to agitate or unsettle or drive away someone's security to the point they are insecure (*Ibid.*, p. 400). This word was used of a ship that was totally insecure out in the ocean blowing in any direction, or of a reed that was just blowing this way and that way in the wind. That is what false doctrine will do to your faith.

It will shake up your faith and composure. The word "composure" is one that refers to your mental understanding and thought (*Ibid.*, p. 305). The adverb "quickly" (ταχως) has to do with rapid, swift speed (*Ibid.*, p. 441).

False doctrine and false teaching has the potential of making your mind very insecure when it comes to what you believe about God and it can do it with rapid speed. It does not take long for faulty teaching to devastate your doctrinal composure and faith. You sit under faulty teaching and it won't be long before you won't know what you believe.

False teaching about any doctrine, including prophecy, can quickly affect you. False teaching about grace, false teaching about Christ, false teaching about the Rapture can quickly affect your mind and shake up your faith to the point that you are no longer secure or stable.

Purpose #2 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents a believer from being disturbed by a spirit . **2:2b**

Now the word "disturbed" is critical to several of these stated purposes. The word "disturb" (θροεω) is a word that indicates being very troubled and alarmed to the point of outcry (*Ibid.*, p. 209). False teaching has the potential of troubling and alarming a believer to the point that his faith is shaken.

Now the outcry could mean that false teaching can cause real problems in a church. People will not be quiet about false doctrine. False doctrine can quickly trouble you to the point that you are not talking logically or Biblically.

There are three stated ways false doctrine can infiltrate a believer and infiltrate a church: 1) A spirit; 2) A message - a spoken word; 3) A letter - a written word. Undoubtedly behind all of these is "a spirit." In fact, the preposition "by" specifically appears in Greek before the noun "spirit."

So carefully notice what or who is behind false teaching and doctrine, "a spirit." This means a demonic spirit. All faulty teaching has demonic spirits behind it - whether it is verbal or written. The people giving the false teaching appear to be knowledgeable and respectable and religious. They are actually in the church, but they are unleashing teaching that is demonic; and when that happens, it has the potential of devastating the church. Don't kid yourself; people presenting false doctrine are not just confused, they are being used by Satan to try to attack a church.

Purpose #3 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents a believer from being disturbed by a message . **2:2c**

False teaching communicates a false message. False teaching comes from false teachers who teach what is false. Now the specific false message they were communicating was that "the day of the Lord has come." In other words, there were people in the church who were claiming that the Church was in the Tribulation and they were claiming Paul taught it.

I want to share a personal story here that has to do with Dr. John Walvoord. After we left our first church, a heretic, who had actually gone to Dallas Seminary, became pastor for a while at our former church. He started teaching some weird things and the board started sensing it. He ended up being arrested for stealing, and at a congregational meeting he stood up and said he was demon-possessed and that Dr. Walvoord agreed that this was his problem. Well when the chairman of the board called me, I immediately called Dr. Walvoord. He was convalescing at home. I said to Dr. Walvoord, "I am so sorry to bother you at home, but there is a graduate of your school who was arrested for stealing and he claims a demon made him do it, and he says you agree with him that a believer may be demon-possessed. I said to Dr. Walvoord, I have read most things you have written, and I don't believe you have ever taught that; but I just need to ask you whether or not you said this to this man." Dr. Walvoord was very kind and he said, "I do not know who this man is, and I have never taught such a thing in all of my life." This man was presenting false doctrine to a church and saying it was the belief of a man who did not believe it. That is exactly what was happening to Paul. People were saying he taught things he never taught.

Purpose #4 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents a believer from being disturbed by false writings. **2:2d**

Not only were people verbally presenting false doctrine, but someone apparently had actually forged a letter, claiming that it had been written by Paul, which attacked true Grace Age prophecy. This was an outright blatant lie. Paul never taught that Grace Age believers were going into the Tribulation. He had never taught that "the day of the Lord had come."

Now the phrase "the day of the Lord" refers to the time period that includes the Great Tribulation that leads to the day Jesus Christ comes back in all of His glory to establish His Millennial Kingdom on this earth.

The Church does not live "in the day of the Lord," period; it lives "in the day of grace," period. This is not the age of wrath, this is the age of grace. In this day of grace, God is not pouring out His wrath like He will in the Tribulation. In fact, we know God's Church will not go into the Tribulation because Paul already taught that we are not destined for the wrath time (I Thess. 5:9). But apparently, someone wrote a false letter saying that it was from Paul and saying the Church was in the Tribulation.

False doctrine comes through false writings. If you read faulty religious articles or books, it can shake up your faith.

False teaching abounds in written form. Go into a "Christian bookstore" and just look at the amount of material that promotes the charismatic movement. The charismatic movement is false. It is leading millions of people away from what is sound. There are books and books and books that all communicate what is false. If you aren't grounded and if you don't know truth, you can be swayed by this stuff.

Purpose #5 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents a believer from being disturbed by false teaching. **2:2e**

The specific false prophetic teaching was that the “day of the Lord has come.” It is obvious by what Paul says here that the day of the Lord had not come, but some in the church were saying it had.

This seems like such a little issue. What difference does it make whether or not you believe you are in the Tribulation? What is the big deal? This can mess up your whole spiritual stability.

One of the great disturbing problems today that promotes things just a little off is the problem of a denomination. The more you actually know of the Word of God, the more you will see the fallacy and the inconsistency in denominationalism.

Purpose #6 - Being precise in prophetic knowledge prevents one from being deceived. **2:3a**

The word “deceive” is a very intense Greek word. First of all, the verb is aorist tense which means God does not want His people deceived even one time. Secondly, the verb indicates that God does not want His people moving away and out from the truth of His Word even once.

God does not want His people duped or deceived in any area of doctrine. He wants them so knowledgeable of His Word that they cannot be budged even one time.

PARTING THOUGHTS:

- 1) It is imperative that we know exactly what we believe about every doctrine including biblical prophecy.**
- 2) Demons try to attack God’s people through various religious messages and various religious writings.**
- 3) God wants His written Word carefully taught and understood in His church.**