

2 Thessalonians

Sunday 7/24/2005

Bern and I, in hell for eternity, have lost the perspective of any eternal judgment without God because we Christians think there is no hurry. We have all the time in the world. We are living our lives like we are going to live forever. We say we believe the Bible. We say we believe there is a judgment seat of Christ. We say we believe there is a day coming when we are going to give an account, but we do not live our lives with urgency. We live our lives for what we want to do, and we give God what is left over, whether it is convenient or not. We are looking for the best deal in this Christian world we can find for us. We are no longer interested in the best deal for God. We lost our concept of God a long time ago.

I. The Deception of the Last Days

As much as we preach against the unity crowd and the spiritist crowd and all that, let me tell you something: we are no different as Baptists than the folks down there at Disney World watching Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Princess Whoever and everybody else down there. We are in a dream world. The slow deception has been for one goal and for one purpose only: it is to deceive you and me into believing that the man of sin, when he comes, will be the real Christ instead of the Antichrist. Absolutely, that is the whole part of this deception. It is not hard to figure out; the whole concept of this deception is for one thing.

There are a lot of things that get caught in the middle. The church loses its mission. We lose our fervor. We lose in our fight. We just kind of lay around and are like a big couch potato. We never really do anything for God. I know that is part of the process, but that is not the main goal. The main goal has always been and will always be that the devil is coming to set himself up in a counterfeit coming of Christ. He is preparing and has prepared the whole world to believe exactly who he will be when he comes.

We see it through this slow erosion that education replaces your walk with God. When churches want a pastor today, they do not care what he knows about the Bible. There is no question they ask him about what they believe. They want to know where he went to school. They want to know how many degrees he has after his name because we have been deceived into thinking that the more educated you are, the more godly you are. That is part of the deception. The devil always reverses the obvious. We think that it is education when, in reality, it is your walk with God.

He has taken the common, ordinary man with a common, ordinary Bible, and he has replaced it now with the deception that you have to learn Greek and Hebrew. I know I harp on this a lot of times, and I know because I make it a clear fact that you understand where this church is at with it. But let me just tell you how this thing works. This thing is an incredible concept. You realize that once the world bought into the deception that you had to know Greek and Hebrew to really know the Bible, the moment a person buys into that, they are finished when it comes to the Bible.

Do you know why? Because there is no way you can learn Greek and Hebrew in a lifetime where you can really have a working knowledge of it. You just cannot. As we speak here today, if it takes a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to learn your Bible, less than one millionth of a percent of the world's population has that ability.

II. The Deception of Excuses and Self-Pity

I am telling you what human nature is. I was telling somebody this morning, there are two kinds of Christians I have found in 35 years of my ministry:

1. Those who will do everything they can to get to church.
2. Those who do everything they can not to get to church.

They will look up in the morning and they will see a cloud way over Colorado and say, "It is going to rain, going back to bed." They will hear the weather forecast the night before and they will say, "A chance of snow tomorrow, we are going to get seven inches. Hey, honey, prepare, we are not going to church tomorrow." That says a lot about a person.

People find a way to get where they want to get. Parents get deceived in this many times with their own kids. I have seen it in my own life, seen it in my own girls' lives. If somebody was having a party and I could not take them, and they wanted to go, they were on that phone for ten hours, and they found somebody. They found a way to get them there. Life is about choices, and this deception is turning everything around. The moment you tell your flesh you cannot do it, the moment you give yourself the option that you are going to stop, that it is impossible, do not ever give your flesh that option. Do not ever tell yourself, "I cannot do this." Maybe you will fail in it, but give it the best shot you can.

Your flesh and my flesh are the same, and the more you tell it what you cannot do, the more it loves it. When you tell yourself or somebody tells you, "You really cannot understand the Bible anyhow unless you go to seminary," do you know what the flesh is going to say? "What is the point then? I am not going to read it or study it because I cannot learn it anyhow." Do not go there. That is where we go. The devil always takes an interception. The right thing becomes the wrong thing, and the wrong thing becomes the right thing. He always turns it around.

III. The Passive Church vs. The Militant Church

Christianity was once a militant force. They burned an old martyr at the stake one time. When they burned him at the stake, they hated him so bad they came up and they said, "We are going to separate you from the church by burning you at the stake." He said, "You may separate me from the church militant on earth, but you will never separate me from the church triumphant." That is the one he was spiritual up in heaven.

We have lost that today. Christianity has now become cultured. Christianity has now become respectable. Christianity now wants to be run like corporations. We do not have pastors; we have CEOs. We have men and churches who look like the Taj Mahal and everything. The body of Christ was called to be a militant army that has a spiritual warfare, that has spiritual weapons. Of

course, it has become passive. That is why there is no preaching today. That is why you go to the average church—you find some exceptions—it is all about preaching.

I was kidding you when you gave me my chair. The new thing is out of California, it has been out for five or six years, that the pastor now wears a sweater, becomes one with the people. That is not how you do it, by the way. Try playing third base. He sits on a nice stool and he sits there and he philosophizes with you. He tells you about this and he tells you about that for 25, 30 minutes. You are supposed to go, "Oh, oh, see." And then you walk out and you are saying, "Wow, wasn't that great this morning?" The bottom line is, again, never give your—here it is, here is the key: if your flesh gravitates to it, stay away from it.

If my preaching does not make you mad sometimes, take that chair back. No, no, no, do not do that. Just take the footstool back. You are not to like my preaching all the time. I have to rub you the wrong way, some way deep down inside. You have that little hidden thing you do not show anybody. It will just get to you sometimes. And yet you have to smile at me and hug me at the end because you are not going to let me know, but deep down inside, I burned you.

I am telling you, the church has become passive. The church has become a place where it is not militant anymore. Christians do not want a militant stand. They are not in a warfare. Any army that loses its weapon is going to get slaughtered in the battle. Christianity has become a slaughterhouse. The deception is clear. The devil has gone through changing everything from what it was to what it is through that slow erosion process. It has brought it to the place where today, we as the body of Christ are so confused.

I feel for young couples who are faced with what is out there with raising their kids. With no help, they go to a church, and all the church wants is their money. All they want is something from them. They do not want to take the time to hand-craft something for you and your family, whatever that need may be, to grasp and learn and grow to do it right. The whole thing has just turned around to such a degree. The process has all been about that when the Antichrist shows up, everybody on planet Earth mistakes him for Christ to such a degree.

If you would look in the book of Revelation, you will find two white horse riders. The first white horse rider is in Revelation chapter 6. The second white horse rider is in Revelation chapter 19. Every denominational seminary on this planet teaches that the white horse rider in Revelation chapter 6 is the second coming of Christ. The Revelation rider in Revelation 6 is not Christ; it is the Antichrist. The deception is complete. By the way, read that chapter sometime. Go down in there, and you will find one of the clearest places that shows you how the Roman Catholic Church and the Muslims are going to line up together. Incredible. A little thing God just stuck in there for somebody that is paying attention.

The church has become big. The church has become beautiful. In spite of the fact that the Bible says in Revelation 3:18 that they are wretched, miserable, blind, poor, and naked. The obvious is never true. The Bible says that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. If the whole world thinks it is big and beautiful and wonderful, I have a standard concept for you: God is not there. God's people down through history have always been maligned. They have always been beaten up. They have always been persecuted. Why do you

think that the world hated Christ? They did what they did to Him, and then you find a church today that is just glorious and beautiful, and everything is just wonderful and fine when they did not treat the Lord that way. It has always been. The obvious, the deception, has always reversed the obvious.

IV. The Model of John Rawlings: Don't Be Deceived, Disarmed, Discouraged

Two weeks ago, we studied the book of Colossians. As I broke that book down, I showed you in chapter one that it was a redefining of who Christ is, and then I showed you or I gave you six or seven questions about who Christ is to show that. Last week, I took First Thessalonians, and we saw a model church for the last days. We saw us being a model servant in the last days, a model faith in the last days, a walk, our model life, all showing us in these last days what we should be right before the rapture of the church. Today, in Second Thessalonians, with the theme "Don't be deceived," Paul lays out the two comings: the first one, which is Christ's coming, which is the real one, and then he lays out the false one, which is going to be the Antichrist.

Back in 1972, a long time ago, I just got my life put back together with the Lord, and I got introduced to an old boy, I think he is dead now, his name was John Rawlings. John Rawlings was, without a doubt, one of the last of the old Philadelphian preachers. John Rawlings was one of O.J. Frank Norris' boys that came out with the bust out of the Southern Baptist Convention back in the 40s, and he took over a church in Cincinnati, Ohio, called Landmark Baptist Church.

Through the process of my life, I was not satisfied just to hear; I wanted to know why I believe what I believe. I did not want to get hooked up with the wrong crowd because Baptists can be a pretty crazy bunch sometimes. So I got to research all this stuff, and I went back and I started where I was going back through the Baptist Bible Fellowship, moving back to where it came from, O.J. Frank Norris, taking the individual guys and then laying them out. A lot of them I already knew, a lot of them I had known personally, a lot of them I had heard preach, never met them but I heard them preach. I have been associated with their ministries, knew what they did.

John Rawlings was something else. When I met him in 1972, he was probably 75 years old, still pastoring the Landmark Baptist Church. The Landmark Baptist Church is an interesting church. That church was called the Lockland Baptist Church, which started in 1798 on the frontier of Ohio, right there by the Ohio River, where Cincinnati is now. John Rawlings took that church over, and that church had a history that went back all the way back to the 1700s. It is arguably the first Baptist church in Ohio.

John Rawlings preached that night in 1972 a message that I have never forgotten. In fact, a lot of what shaped the way I am today and the style that I am, what I believe, and how I preach and the way I minister is based on a lot of what I learned from my old boys. I still have back from the 70s original messages on cassette tape. I do not dare listen to them anymore, afraid it will break them. I need to transfer them over sometime, but I still have it because they impacted my life, and I will never forget it.

It was a Sunday night at the Canton Baptist Temple. It was in July or August because it was hot, and I used to play the trumpet, and we had a little band or a little group up there that played along with the congregation while I was sitting on the platform. Old John Rawlings came up to preach, and he preached that night a great message. It was a three-point outline, and it was simply this:

- Don't be deceived.
- Don't be disarmed.
- Don't be discouraged.

I have never forgotten that message. That message has formed my philosophy of life and ministry for the last thirty-some years of my life. I remember that night and its impact on me like it happened yesterday. It changed my outlook, and from that point, I never forgot that, and no matter how tough it got, no matter how bad it got, no matter how good it got, I never forgot from that point on that the devil wanted to deceive me, and that the only way I could keep from being deceived was to get in that Book. The way the devil could deceive me is if I let somebody disarm me and take that Book from me, and I made up my mind nobody was going to take my Bible from me.

I made up my mind that nobody was going to talk me out of that Book that God gave me because I realized that that Book was my sword, it was my armor or my armament, and that Book was my weapon by which I was going to fight this war. I was not going to get deceived by the people around me that threw their sword away and picked up a butter knife and thought they could fight this battle. It is because God did not deceive me, it is because I was not disarmed, that today, in the midst of this mess going around, I am not discouraged.

I talk to pastors all the time that are discouraged. They are discouraged with their people. They have no idea that their people are exactly what they have taught them to be. Your people are discouraged because you are discouraged. You have to lead by an example, and an example we saw that last week. If you are going to pastor, you have to be something if you are going to reach anybody. All these pastors are always saying, "Well, my people, I just feel disconnected to my people." You are, and I wish my ministry just is not really going. You do not, because your people are out here doing everything that they are doing, and you are over here, and you have never made an effort to get in with them.

Let me tell you something: if you want to reach whatever people group you want to reach, you have to get in with that people group. If they are playing ball on Friday night, play ball with them, go watch them, encourage them, whatever. If you want to reach them, you cannot be over here and then be over here and then wonder why you are never involved, because you have chosen not to be. I told a pastor one time, "You want your people? Go where they are at. Get involved with what they are doing. Do not sit over here whining about it while they are out there living their lives. Go be one with them." That is how you do it. But they cannot grasp it. They have been deceived, and they have been deceived because they have been disarmed. When you

get deceived, you get disarmed. They do not know what to do with their people, and now they are discouraged.

One guy said, "Well, I know what to do with my people." I said, "I can help you out. What is that? Send them to me. I know what to do with them." From that night, I have never—I am not saying I have not been discouraged, but I have not been discouraged, if you know what I mean. I have never allowed them to disarm me, and I am not saying I am above being deceived. I am just saying I can look around this world, and I can smell the wind, and I know what is blowing where with this great Book.

V. The Two Comings: Christ and Antichrist

In Second Thessalonians, he lays out the theme not to be deceived, and he lays out the two comings. The first coming is the coming of the Lord in chapter one, and the breakdown of this book is really easy: chapter one is the coming of the Lord, chapter two and chapter three are the coming of the Antichrist, the man of sin. The terrible tragedy is this: God's people today do not even have a clue.

Again, if you are just somebody that has been newly saved, or you are somebody that has been saved five years or less, I am not even talking to you. I will help you. I will work with you. I will give you somebody to work with you. I will do whatever it takes to get you up to speed with the Bible. If you have a family, if you have kids, if you are a single parent, if you are married, I do not care, I will help you. The people in church will help you. I will work with you. We will disciple you. We will teach you the Bible. We will get you there. But I am telling you, God's people do not have a clue today. The deception has been so subtle and so slow and so complete that I have said this before, and I am going to keep on saying it: the only thing that would keep the body of Christ from lining up with the Antichrist, the man of sin, when he showed up, is the rapture. God is going to take us out of here before, otherwise, we would go hand in hand down the primrose path because we have accepted the devil's doctrines. We have accepted his ministers. We have accepted his Bible. We have accepted his church. We have accepted his music, and the whole thing is just a mess. God's people have been deceived.

They look at the great things that are out there. I heard a statement, and I am not going to tell you who this is because I do not like to bring personalities into it because I am not mad at anybody, but I am just reporting the truth. I heard some Christian people on television talking about a great famous evangelist, and they said about this guy, "You know what?" He said, "I followed this man's ministry for 40 years, and I have never heard anybody from any other persuasion of religion or anybody ever say anything bad about this guy." And the guy said, "Man, that is just marvelous! Praise the Lord! Oh, glory to God!" They jibbered and jabbered back and forth for a while, and I thought to myself, "Wow, what a terrible ministry that must have been if you preach 40 years and you do not kick some people off, make some people mad, have a lot of people hating you and just looking at you with disdain. You have failed in your mission." When did Jesus Christ get along with everybody? He was not here 15 minutes, and they were trying to kill Him. And you go 40 years without making anybody mad?

I am mad. I am sorry. I should have just let that go. But look at my chair a minute. I am mad. Oh boy. How are you doing, Tinker? Watch them. They are too in trouble. Are the backs of their heads on the back of it? I did not look at that. Oh, no, they are not. God's people have not got a clue. What a mess we are in.

Let us look at chapter one. We have to get moving here. That was all introduction, by the way. Look at chapter one. In chapter one, we have the real return of the Lord. You would think God's people would get it. The Antichrist shows up, and then the real Christ shows up. If you really know your Bible, how would you mess that up? You always know the real article comes the second time. It is not your first birth; it is your second birth. It was not Abel; it was Seth. It was not Ishmael; it was Isaac. It was not Esau; it was Jacob. You see how you would mess that up? It was not the first Adam; it was the second Adam. How would you miss that unless you have been deceived?

He says down here in verse six:

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

You have to look at that for a minute. We do not have time to stop here much. Remember last Thursday night, or a couple of nights ago, I told you about what you were going to be in eternity. You see that thing, "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints"? And "to be admired in all them that believe because our testimony among you was believed in that day." Do you know what he is saying here? He is saying here that great chapter showing you the fact that there is great comfort in the price you are going to pay and I am going to pay in these last days for preaching this Book. God says, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you." There is coming a day when God is going to make everything right.

Do not be deceived. Do not be disarmed. Do not be discouraged. Let them take you to the wall. Let them do whatever they are going to do to you. Let them say whatever they are going to say. Stand by the truth. I am telling you, the rapture is coming. He is coming, and there is going to be a lot of egg on a lot of people's faces when Christ comes back because His Book is true. He is saying, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Let me tell you something, He is coming back, and when He comes back, He is going to make every wrong right.

Do not be deceived. Do not get in the mindset that you are living your life like you are going to live forever. You have a short season to do what God wants you to do, and do not let the devil sidetrack you, deceive you into a deception that you get your life so complicated that you cannot accomplish that mission, and you end your life without doing a thing for God.

VI. The Comfort of Not Being Alone

I remember reading through the Bible years ago, and I started in Genesis, and I got me some books by Arthur Pink that were great books. I remember reading the story of Noah, and that has been a great story for me too because when I think about all that thing back there in Genesis chapter 6, when I came through the Bible, I thought to myself, so many times believing what I believe and the whole world around you not believing what you believe, and Christian brothers and sisters calling someone who believes the Bible is still the Word of God a heretic or a cult. If you allow yourself to, you cannot get feeling sorry for yourself.

I do not have a lot of patience for people who feel sorry for themselves. I really do not. You have people who are in a continuous state of "woe is me." I am sorry, your life for the most part is... I could look at guys like that guy that rode a marathon bike five thousand times; he has got cancer, he does it. I do not have a lot of self-pity stuff. My drill sergeant one time back there told me if I wanted to know after I knew what the word sympathy meant, and he said, "Well, you will find it in a dictionary between two words," and I cannot tell you what those other two words are, but it cured me.

Have you ever felt alone in this Christian fight? Elijah felt alone back there in First Kings, but he really was not. We think we are all by ourselves; we are not. Elijah is back there, he is down and crying in his beer—I do not know if he drank beer—he is crying in his face down there, and he is saying, "Oh, Lord!" Do you know what God says? He says, "Man, you have lost your perspective, son." He says, "I have four thousand men out there that have not bowed the knee to Baal, nor have they kissed him." He thought he was by himself.

Paul thought he was by himself. I understand it. He is in the prison back there, and he said at the end of Second Timothy, "Only Luke is with me." But yet he had hundreds of people praying for him. He was not by himself. Jonah thought he was by himself. He is out there moping around Nineveh, whining and crying about everything. He was not by himself. Martin Luther said one time, somebody said, "Don't you know the whole world is against you?" He snarled back, "Well, I am against the whole world." But he really was not by himself. You and I, no matter how alone we feel, we are not alone.

But there is one man in the Bible that was all alone. Do you know who it was? It was Noah. There is no indication that even Noah's wife or his boys were any support for him. Noah preached about the second coming of the Lord and God's judgment for 120 years, and nobody, nobody got saved. Nobody came forward. Nobody even showed up. Nobody believed anything he said for 120 years. Do you know how discouraged he must have gotten? Do you know how

there must have been times when he just got alone with God and just said, "God, do you know what You are doing? Do you know what You are talking about? God, You have me building a boat three football fields long in my backyard. First problem is my backyard is not that large. I have five neighbors on both sides of my house. I have nine lawsuits on me now. Lord, You said it is going to rain. Lord, I love You. What is rain? It has not rained yet. Lord, You have me out there standing on the end of that platform preaching about Your coming. Everybody in this world, Lord, there are six million people on this planet, they all say they love You. They all go to church. They are all doing what they say is right. Who in the world am I getting up there with a negative message in a positive world? The whole world is saying, 'We are fine, we are lovely, Kumbaya, my Lord, Kumbaya. We are all together, all the gays, all the lesbians, all this, all that, everybody together, link arms. There are many roads to heaven. We just go down whichever one fancies us.' And I am up there preaching, 'You are all going to die and burn in hell for eternity.'"

I am sure in that 120 years there were times when he thought he was alone because he was alone. But there was a day when he got up and he opened that front door and walked out to go to work, and it looked like it was midnight. The sun did not come up that morning. Across those mountains, he saw the blackest rolling thunderclouds that any man has ever seen in the history of the world. He moved down with his family down there. He knew something was coming. Do you know how he knew something was coming? Because majestically, without anything at all, animals started showing up and going up the gangplank. The animals. There were men that were laughing at Noah, making fun of Noah, and down the road came two animals that they had never seen. And one of them said to the other one, "Now, look at that. My granddaddy told me about there ain't no animals like those." Animals came from all over the earth in orderly fashion, two by two, clean ones by seven, in order, walked down that ark, up into that by themselves. He knew something was coming, but he did not know what. I know something is coming. I see them all lining up.

He went out that day, and the sun was not shining, and the sky was black. Over in the distance, he saw a crack of lightning for the first time and heard the rumble of thunder. To this day, when you hear that thunder, the old wives' tale is that the giants are bowling. I remember as a little kid, when I heard a crack of thunder, some old-timers said, "Oh, the giants are bowling." I said, "What giants? Don't you know both the giants?" And I said, "Well, you are bigger than I am, I am just like this. No, I do not know anything." That is where back to Genesis 6.

He may have had doubts for 120 years and felt like he was alone when he was, but when he got on that ark and God shut the door, and the rain started to come down, and he heard hundreds of people screaming and yelling and beating on that door, "Noah, let me in! Noah, I am sorry! Noah, I wished I had listened!" Noah sat back there, and I bet you, with tears running down his face, he said, "I cannot open the door. I cannot open the door." Deep down inside, as he sat down in that ark, put his hand between his legs, there was one comfort. Do you know what that comfort was? In that 120 years, when he doubted it, when God called him to do something that He called no other man to do, when He called him to preach things that were not popular in the world, it was preaching everything else. He had the satisfaction when he sat in that boat that he had done what God called him to do, and God was right.

Somebody said to me one time, "Why would you think you are right? Don't you know the whole world believes something different?" And I said, "You know what? In Noah's day, there were six million people on planet Earth, and only eight got into the ark." Why? Because that which was highly esteemed among men was an abomination in the sight of God. That is why they bought the deception. Noah did not. By the way, another little term: "Don't miss the boat." A lot of people miss the boat. Genesis 6. To this day, do not miss the boat. I am telling you this morning, if you are here and you are unsaved and you are lost, do not miss the boat. When God shuts the door, it is shut.

He is saying down here in chapter one, the Lord is coming with fire, and He is going to destroy the world, and He is going to bring back everything that is right. He is going to establish Israel and all the things that God said He was going to do. I do not care what the world says today. I do not care how they laugh at you. I do not care how they make fun of you. One of these days, when that old rapture of the church takes place, brother, we are safe in the arms of God, and God unleashes all the power of hell on this planet. It will be a good day. So chapter one deals with the coming of the Lord.

VII. The Mystery of Iniquity and the Strong Delusion

Then we get into chapter two, probably the greatest chapter in all the New Testament that details out the coming man of sin. Let me read it for you very quickly down here:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

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

Great passage, one of the greatest passages in the New Testament. So much in this chapter, I do not know where to begin, but let us talk about it this way. We have to break this chapter down here. Here is how we do it: verse seven is the breakdown verse. It says, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he that now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." What we have here is the revealing and the coming of the Antichrist. This is called the mystery of iniquity.

Let me explain the mystery of iniquity. There are seven mysteries in the New Testament. Those seven mysteries are given to the body of Christ. Those seven mysteries are intimate things about the Bible the average Christian has no clue on. You want to find out where a Christian is, how big they talk, what they talk about, what they have done, where they have been, all this stuff, just ask them to give you three of the seven mysteries. You cannot be a functioning Christian in tune with God and the Word of God without knowing those mysteries. I am sorry.

There are seven to the church. There are twelve to the nation of Israel. You can say what you want to say, believe what you want to say, you can deceive yourself all you want, you cannot be plugged into the Book and the Word of God without knowing them. You just cannot. They are vital, absolutely vital. In fact, the Bible says that the pastor is going to give an account or accountability someday at the judgment seat of Christ for being a steward of those mysteries. A pastor is to teach those mysteries to his people. We have not got there yet. Most of you have been around for a while, you have them, but at some point, we will go through them and get everybody up to speed.

Just like there are seven mysteries, in the last book we looked at, we saw seven things not to be ignorant of. Just like there are seven mysteries of the church, there are seven things the church is not to be ignorant of. By the way, these are the fourteen things that the church is most ignorant of and do not understand about the mysteries. Why? The deception. The devil is not going to let you get those things because they reveal too much about him.

This mystery of iniquity is really simple, and basically, it is this: the first time you find Babylon is in Genesis 10. The last time you find Babylon is Revelation 17 and 18. Six thousand years between the history of man. This mystery of iniquity is how in the world did the devil make it from point A to point B without getting caught? That is all it is. How did the devil do it for 6,000 years of man's history? How in the world did he get from Genesis 10, the first Babylon, to Revelation 17 and 18, where he is sitting on the throne as God with all the believers missing it and the whole world deceived by it? The answer to that question is the face of his garments. The mystery of iniquity is the background, behind-the-scenes work of the devil and what he has done down through 6,000 years of man's history from religion, politics, and science to set himself up as God. That is all that it is. This deceptive work is known as the garments of deception. He has

changed clothes with the scenery down through history, and the only one that could find him were those that had a Book that detailed him out. When he got the Book out of our hands, he had free course to do what he wanted to do.

Let us look at this passage, verse seven. Verse seven is the rapture of the church. Here is what you have: you have two revealings of the Antichrist. You have one revealing when he comes into this world secretly, probably already has. You have another revealing after the rapture of the church when he reveals himself as the Antichrist, the man of sin. That counterfeit Christ showed up the first time; he showed up privately. Nobody knew he came except his family, some wise men. Thirty years later, he made his public ministry to the whole world. That is what the devil did: two revealings of the Antichrist.

I do not know how it all lays out. I do not know the time element. I know this: the nation of Israel, we see many, many times, plays a key factor in this. We know that at some point, sometime, right now, over there in the Middle East or somewhere, there is a man that has been born and is alive that is going to become the son of perdition. He is revealed to this earth as being born in it, and then he is revealed at a later time as the man of sin.

Verse seven is the rapture of the church. Everything one, two, three, four, five, six fits into the rapture. Everything eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve on down to the rest of the chapter fits in after the rapture. Look at verse seven. Here is the rapture: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work." It was working in Paul's time when he was writing this. It is working in 1980. It is working in 2005. It has been at work all this time. That mystery of iniquity is the deception that the devil pulls off to deceive the whole world. Verse seven: "Only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way." Do you know what he is saying? There is only one thing holding back the Antichrist right now as we speak: that is the Holy Spirit of God living inside the body of Christ and the body of Christ on this planet. But it says in verse seven that "now letteth will let until he," the Holy Spirit of God, "be taken out of the way." When does that happen? Rapture of the church. So verse seven is the rapture. He is telling us in verse seven that the mystery of iniquity already works, has been working for five thousand, six thousand years. The only thing that is holding it back is the Holy Spirit of God in us, but there is coming a day when that rapture takes place that it will be taken out of the way.

Verse eight: "And then," after the Holy Spirit of God is gone, "shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." All right, after the rapture, then the wicked is revealed.

Come up to verse one: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." There is where he is born, that he is

born sometime toward the end of the Laodicean church period before the rapture. "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"

He is telling you that the original goal of the devil has always been the same. We think the first sin in the Bible is Adam and Eve. That is not true. The first sin in the Bible is Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, when Lucifer tried to overthrow God and later became the devil. What he says there shows you the number one problem that he had, that he always had. He said, "I will be, I will set my throne on the side of the north; I will be like the most high God." The devil wants to be God. Here is his number one problem: it is pride. Hence, that is the number one problem you and I have to deal with: is pride. The devil cannot see anything but himself. A lot of God's people cannot see anything but themselves, and that is just the way that it works.

So we have coming down here through verses one through six, we are talking about the fact that he is revealed on this planet, and then verse seven, the rapture of the church, and after that, "then shall that Wicked be revealed." Here is the second revelation, the revealing as the man of sin. Right now, he is somewhere behind the scenes. He is somewhere behind the scenes, patiently waiting for the deception to fulfill itself. All the stuff that is going on in the Middle East, all the stuff with terrorism, all the stuff that is going on politically, all the stuff that is going on scientifically, all the stuff that is going on with the Bible in the churches, in Christianity, everything is falling into place in that passive, mush mode where nothing is real, nothing is open, everything is just there, and there is nothing that is discernible. Through that, he will reveal himself as the man of sin after the rapture of the church.

When the rapture takes place, the Holy Spirit of God as we know it is off this planet. You and I, the body of Christ, every saved person on this planet, is the only thing holding back the force of Satan. When that body of Christ is exited out at the rapture, the Antichrist now completely owns this world. That is why everything he has done from Genesis up to this point has to prepare the world that when we are gone, he takes over.

I have had people ask me all the time, "How is the devil going to explain, if the rapture is true, how is the devil going to explain away the disappearance of a hundred million people?" Well, that is taking the example that there are a hundred million people saved. I mean, there may be just twenty gone, I do not know. But the mystery of iniquity already works. The deception is already there. I do not know what it will be, but it is all laid out and planned out that it is not going to be a problem.

I will tell you why it is not going to be a problem even more than that. Come on down to the end of the chapter. Pick it up in verse 10: "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." All right, there are the people that are left when the rapture takes place. There are people that are left, maybe some in this room have never trusted Christ as your own personal Savior. That whole world out there will go on. It will just be absent of a bunch of people who are painning everybody's backside to begin with, and it will be a great relief for us to be gone.

But the Bible says in verse 11: "And for this cause," what is the cause? "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Because people right now, maybe sitting in this room, people that you work with, people that you have witnessed to, people that are your friends, people that are your children, because they have rejected the love of the truth that they might be saved, once that Holy Spirit of God is gone, verse 11, "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." You reject the Holy Spirit of God that is truth. You reject the Word of God that is truth. When truth goes, you get the lie you wanted. Do you know how that thing works? You get the lie you wanted.

Now, why does he do that? Verse 12: "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." Let me just say this to you before we go back and put this all together: if you miss the rapture of the church, it is over for you. There is no second chance. You are not going to get another shot. You are not going to become a Jew and run around with the nation of Israel. The Bible makes it very clear, and I know you have people all around the world. I have known people all my life that bought extra Bibles and then put instructions in them in pertinent places so that when somebody missed the rapture, they would open it up and find it and get saved. It does not work that way. You have one chance, and that chance is now. That is why the Bible says, "Behold, today is the day of salvation." Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth. You have one chance, it is your life. When you harden your heart and when you reject the love of the truth that you might be saved, and you reject that, when the rapture takes place and you are left, at that moment, God gives you, after the multitude of your heart, God gives you the lie you want to believe. You want to believe in the world? He is going to give you the world, and He is going to give you a god and a Christ that fit your ticket of just what you have deceived yourself into believing for one purpose: to damn you. To damn you. No second chance. No, "Well, you did not have..." No. We are talking about God's Son hanging on a cross, dying for you, agonizing for you, and then you living your life the way you want to, thumbing your nose at God, and then missing the rapture and then going to get in on a special trip ticket. I do not think so. We are talking about God's Son hanging there, dying for you and for me.

You see, that is the kind of preaching that is missing today. That is what is wrong with Christianity. That is why God's people do not like it. That is why you cannot build a church with thousands of people preaching that way because nobody wants to hear the truth anymore. The truth is this: you miss that rapture, you miss that Savior on the cross, and you are lost in the world.

There is a revealing of him into this world, the son of perdition. That is a great study, rolled all the way back to John. Only two men in the Bible are called the son of perdition. You want to find out who the Antichrist is? Start in John 17, work your way out from there. There is a revealing. Just as the Antichrist will be born into this world and rise through the political, scientific, religious world to a great point, and then the rapture takes place at the right time. God is ready for all things to be ended, and then he is revealed as the man of sin. He goes into Jerusalem. He claims before the whole world to be God. The whole world has bought the deception. The whole world has believed the mystery of iniquity. The whole world has been deceived because they

have been disarmed, and because they have been discouraged, and now they believe it, and they actually say, "God is back!" All the religions that believe that, all millennialism or post-millennialism, say, "See, here he is! We brought in the kingdom! Peace on earth, goodwill toward men! The world is a great place! There will be peace with Israel, peace with the world!" For a short period of time, everything looks good, and just as you lull yourself into that satisfaction that the peace has finally come, somebody is going to rain on your parade. The Great Tribulation starts, and this whole world feels the wrath of Almighty God for one purpose: that every man and every woman that heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ during this time, that rejected it or played games with it or fiddled with it but never really took it into your heart, at that moment, at that time, the whole thing comes down for one purpose: that you might be damned because you believed not the truth nor held the love of the truth that you might be saved. You miss the rapture, friend, it is over. It is over.

VIII. The Church's Mission: Free Course for God's Word

Then lastly, in chapter three, my comfort in all this mess. He says down through here:

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

And that ye may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

"For all men have not faith." That is a good one. People are so screwed up today that the Bible says you cannot have faith. It says, "Not all men have faith." Do you know why? We taught a couple of weeks ago, or last week, we talked about a work of faith in a model church. Do you know what the definition of faith is? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." You do not have the Word of God, you do not have faith. You may be saved, but you do not have faith. Faith depends on a Book, and if you do not have it, you do not have it. Faith cometh by hearing, hearing by the Word of God. You cannot have faith without the Book. You can have Christianity. You can run around, do lots of things, but do not tell me you have a working faith, a work of faith, a biblical-based faith, when you do not even have a Bible, when the Bible tells you that that is where your faith comes from.

Great chapter. He says that my job and your job in these last days is to band together and everything we do, that the Word of God has free course. That is what I wanted today. I know what I am preaching this morning. I do not know where you are all at. I love a lot of you. I work with you. We have time in the Bible. I look forward, and like I said, I will work with anybody, put anybody in your life. I do not know where you are all at, but I do know this one thing: because of our stand on the Word of God today, and because we give that Book the preeminence that it is and the glorification that it is and what it deserves, I know this: the Bible has had free course in here. You may not have liked what I said. You may not like me. You may not like my style. You may not agree with anything I said. But I do not care about that. Do you know why? Because you know what it means for the Bible to have free course. Because all during that last hour I have been preaching, the Holy Spirit of God has been walking up and down these aisles,

walking through here, and has been touching people, touching people. He has been saying, "What are you, you are fighting and mad about this?" He is saying, "Yeah, but what about this?" And you are saying, "Well, yeah, but come on, what about this?" You see, He has had free course.

That is what I want. I want when I get up to preach, or one of you guys get up to preach, or somebody gets up to preach, that the Holy Spirit of God just has the ability because we are honoring Him, honoring and glorifying that Book, and we know what we have got, we know what we believe, that we can just preach the Word of God honestly, openly, and say what needs to be said because the Holy Spirit of God—I do not have to worry about making you mad because I do not care if you get mad or you do not. You say, "Well, I will quit, not come back." This church will go on without you. I have some terrible news for you: there is only one person that needs to be here every Sunday, that is the Holy Spirit of God of that Book. Everybody else is optional. It is up to you. You need to be here, but it is up to you. Two kinds of people: people who do everything to get to church, people who do everything to get away from church.

Free course. Free course to touch your life this morning and to touch you and say, "Hey, don't be deceived. Don't be deceived. Don't look at this world around you and think that it is great. We are in the last moments of the last hour before the man of sin becomes revealed because we are going out of here. Get a reality check. It is not Snow White and Cinderella and Goofy and everybody running around in a little costume pretending like it is a really nice place." And inside here, with all the aesthetics and all the beautiful old-time furniture and all the medieval pictures and the statues of pictures and the armor and the swords on the wall, and everybody running around in tights, and everybody walking around in puffy dresses with bun hair, and walking around and smiling, and every time she gets a picture taken, she pulls her dress out like this, and she is always putting her fingers like this, like that is the way life really is. Life is not that way. Put them like that, somebody will step on them.

I am telling you, there is a real world out there. Do not be deceived. In 1972, old John Rawlings, he said, "Bob Alexander, don't be deceived." He said, "Bob Alexander, don't be disarmed. Don't let anybody take that Book from you." And he said, "Bob Alexander, don't be discouraged." Hey, there is a job to do. We are living in the greatest period of time. We are going to be there. I do not care what they say. You laugh at me, only laugh at me, made fun of me, lied about me, tried to assassinate my character all my life. That is the price that comes for believing a Book, and that is okay because there is coming a day when He is going to make every wrong right. That is why you do not have to take it personally. You can say anything you want to say. I am going to take it personal. Do you know why? Because there is coming a day when God is going to make it all right. It will all get ironed out, and we will find out who believed what, who really believed what, and all the things that go along with it. Do you know why? Because in that day, the Bible will have free course, and that is the kind of church we need to have, that somebody gets up and preaches, and the Holy Spirit of God has the freedom to do whatever needs to be done. Every head bowed and every eye closed.