

2 Thessalonians (6): Correction of Mistaken End-times Expectations (4)

In our study of 2 Thessalonians 2, today we desire to address verses 9-12, which reads as follows:

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

In 2 Thessalonians 2 the apostle had set forth two events that would transpire before *appearance* of Jesus Christ at His second coming, when Christians would be gathered together to Him (cf. v. 1). First, a great apostasy would take place within professing Christendom, in that many would depart from the true faith. Second, the man of lawlessness would be revealed, “the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:4). Then, after Paul described some causes that would result in the rise to power of the man of lawlessness, he set forth the satanic power that enables the man of lawlessness to rise. We read in verses 9 and 10, ***“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”***

Interestingly, Paul wrote of the “appearance” [*parousia*, παρουσία] of Jesus Christ at His second coming in verse 1, but then he wrote of the “appearance” [*parousia*, παρουσία] of the man of lawlessness in verse 9. But the appearance of the man of lawlessness is through the power of Satan, who is “the father of lies”, as the Lord Jesus had declared (Cf. John 8:44). **Matthew Henry** wrote of this:

The apostle further describes the reign and rule of this man of sin. Here we are to observe, (1.) The manner of his coming, or ruling, and working: in general, that it is after the example of Satan, the grand enemy of souls, the great adversary of God and man. He is the great patron of error and lies, the sworn enemy of the truth as it is in Jesus and all the faithful followers of Jesus. More particularly, it is with satanical power and deceit. A divine power is pretended for the support of this kingdom, but it is only after the working of Satan.

The man of lawlessness persuades people to submit to him as the true God, or perhaps the true representative of God, but he is in reality the antichrist. He deceives people so that they embrace him and his teaching through signs, miracles, wonders, that convinces those being deceived that he is the true power of God. In some ways he would be like Simon the Sorcerer of the Samaritans. We read of him in Acts 6:9ff:

⁹But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of God.” ¹¹And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

Those who are perishing, that is, those who are damned and moving toward their destiny in hell, are deceived by the fraud and trickery of the man of lawlessness. They are his prey even as he secures them in their damnation. But as evil and deceitful as he is, they are culpable, they are responsible, for their own damnation. For had they followed one prescription, had one principle governed their belief and behavior, they would have been preserved from the error of the man of lawlessness. Paul wrote that they would perish through the deceit of the man of lawlessness, ***“because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”***

Greg Beale stated the matter clearly:

The end-time enemy will also be revealed so that his followers are further deceived and judged along with him. Satan will inspire him *to do all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders* (2:9) and “every kind of deception leading to unrighteousness” (my translation). The devil incarnate aims his deception at unbelievers *who are perishing*. The reason that they are *perishing* is also the reason why they will be deceived further and ultimately judged: *because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason* [their rejection of the truth] *God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness* (2:10-12). The final judgment of believers living on earth at the final phase of history will occur in two stages: they will be deceived further by the antichrist and then be *condemned*. Paul may have in mind people who reject God’s truth revealed in nature (Rom. 1:18-32) but more likely is focusing on those who reject the gospel, both those outside the community of faith and confessing Christians. The latter appear to accept, but on the last day it will be revealed that *they refused to love the truth* they professed. The deceived *will believe the lie* by accepting the claims to deity by the lawless one, which is the epitome of eschatological idolatry.¹

Because of their refusal to receive the love of the truth, they were guilty, deserving of God’s judgment. God would see to it that they would receive justice at the judgment at Christ’s coming. But even now, in this life, God is judging them. God would do so by assuring that they continue in their rejection of the truth that alone brings salvation. He would cause them to believe the lie of the false gospel the man of lawlessness promoted. We read in verse 11 of God’s just judgment:

¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹²in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Two systems of faith are set forth, both of which have present and eternal consequences. First, there are those “who love the truth” of God, which brings salvation. Second, there are those who believe the lie, which results in damnation. The ones who are saved through the truth, do love the truth. The ones who perish through “faith” in the lie, love the “pleasure of unrighteousness.” **Matthew Henry** sets the matter before us:

We have the *sin and ruin of the subjects* of antichrist’s kingdom declared, vs. 11, 12. (1) Their sin is this: *They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*: they did not love the truth, and therefore they did not believe it; and, because they did not believe the truth, therefore they had pleasure in unrighteousness, or in wicked actions, and were pleased with false notions. Note, an erroneous mind and vicious life often go together and help forward one another. (2) Their ruin is thus expressed: *God shall send them strong delusions, to believe a lie*. Thus he will punish men for their unbelief, and for their dislike of the truth and love to sin and wickedness; not that God is the author of sin, but in righteousness he sometimes withdraws his grace from such sinners as are here mentioned; he gives them over to Satan, or leaves them to be deluded by his instruments; he gives them up to their own hearts’ lusts, and leaves them to themselves, and then sin will follow of course, yea, the worst of wickedness, that shall end at last in eternal damnation. God is just when he inflicts spiritual judgments here, and eternal punishments hereafter, upon those who have no love to the truths of the gospel, who will not believe them, nor live suitably to them, but indulge false doctrines in their minds, and wicked practices in their lives and conversations.²

Let us consider this most important matter that will assure that we will be saved at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But let us first consider...

¹ Greg K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (InterVarsity Press, 2003), pp. 222.

² Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6, pp.

I. Those who will be damned at Christ's coming for "they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

We see that it is all important that people understand and love the truth in order to be saved from the eternal damnation of their souls. As we consider what is meant by the apostle, we must first define what he meant by the word, truth.

A. What God declares to be truth

The word, truth, is a common word in the Holy Scriptures. In the New King James Version, the English word, truth, is used frequently. The word is used 223 times in 210 verses of both the Old and The New Testaments.³ Depending on the context in which the word is used, the nuance of the meaning of "truth" varies slightly. Many times "truth" conveys the idea of what is essentially real, or ideal, or true to fact. Truth is often set in contrast to what is not true, that is, what is false. The Scriptures present truth as an objective reality to the thing declared to be true. In other words, contrary to the belief of the postmodern world, which claims truth is a subjective construct of any person in any given context, the Scriptures set forth truth as something that is essential to a thing. Something that is regarded as truth is true apart from and outside of any other thing or anyone. In other words, what the Word of God sets forth as "true" or "truth" is so in reality. It is true to all people at all times in all places. And so, because Christians believe this about truth, they find themselves in a world in which at this very basic level of understanding reality, they are in conflict with the world.

Truth is the principle issue. The Word of God presents truth to be outside of us, apart from us. Truth is objective, unchanging, and applicable to all persons in all places at all times. Christianity is not principally how one "feels" about God, but what God has revealed to us that is true, that which we are to believe and that which governs how we think and live. ***Feelings are subjective; truth is objective.*** Feelings are changeable; truth is unchanging. Our feelings are easily manipulated; truth cannot be changed because it is eternal in nature. Truth is a manifestation of the character and nature of God. Oh yes, our perception of truth changes, but truth itself remains the same.

One of the most insidious aspects of our ***present culture*** is the widely accepted notion that truth is subjective, that "it changes from person to person, depending on a person's societal, family, and political context." Sadly many Christians are infected with this wrong notion of the nature of truth. They thereby follow the way of the world by dismissing readily all objective, assertive, uncompromising truth claims as the spilling forth of manipulative, ignorant, intolerant, and unspiritual bigots. They do not believe objective truth exists, or at least that it can be known by erring humans, so they retreat to the arena of the senses for stimulation, which they then wrongly interpret as spiritual. With respect to truth they become in a sense ***Christian agnostics***. Like agnostics, these believers will say that truth exists just as agnostics say that God exists; but they are like agnostics who say that the God who exists cannot be known; so these Christians say that truth cannot be known. This is worldliness in Christian dress. They dismiss and discredit preachers who proclaim truth. "It is only his opinion." Or, "Well, you know, that's just how pastors are; they really do not understand the real world in which we live."

No, the Bible makes it clear that truth exists and that it can be known. The Scriptures set forth the pastor's chief responsibility to make that truth known. Moreover, he is to assure that any and all who would lead the church elsewhere, be withstood, deposed, and silenced, lest they corrupt the people of God. Paul told Titus that this was his responsibility in Crete, where he was to set in order the new churches of Jesus Christ. He wrote,

⁷For a bishop (i.e. an elder or pastor) must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, ⁸but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, ⁹***holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.*** ¹⁰For there are many

³ Interestingly, the ESV uses the English word, truth, far fewer times: 141 occurrences in 130 verses.

insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹***whose mouths must be stopped***, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. (Titus 1:7-11)

We are to proclaim the clear, unsullied, uncompromised truth about who God is, who His Son is, what righteousness is, what sin is, what the Gospel of salvation is. Essentially we are to make known truth, what it is we are to believe and how that truth guides us in the manner we live before God. Moreover, we are to expose and discredit any and all error and errant teachers and their teaching that would lead our people away from the truth of God's Word.

Now more specifically, what do the Holy Scriptures declare to be "truth."

(1) God Himself is truth. Our Lord Jesus said this regarding His Father: "Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, 'You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, ***but He who sent Me is true***, whom you do not know'" (John 7:28). Our Lord declared the same words in the next chapter: "I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, ***but He who sent Me is true***; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him" (John 8:26).

(2) The Lord Jesus is truth. "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, ***the truth***, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

(3) The Holy Spirit is truth. Our Lord told His disciples, "However, when ***He, the Spirit of truth***, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13).

(4) God's law, or word, is truth. Psalm 119:142 reads, "Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and ***Your law is truth***." Similarly we read in Psalm 119:151, "You are near, O LORD, and ***all Your commandments are truth***." Indeed, all of God's words are truth. Psalm 119:160 reads, "***The entirety of Your word is truth***, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever." We read in the New Testament the Lord Jesus declared the Word of God is truth. In His prayer to His Father, he said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. ***Your word is truth***" (John 17:17). The Gospel itself is truth. Paul wrote of this in Galatians 1 when he was addressing his dealings with false teachers: "to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that ***the truth of the gospel*** might continue with you" (Gal. 2:4).

B. How the truth relates to people

First, consider what benefit that truth brings to ***believers***. The truth has the ability to set us free (John 4:23). We were saved upon hearing the word of truth (Eph. 1:13). For God begot us with the word of truth (James 1:18). God continues to work in us through His truth, sanctifying us with His truth (John 17:7).

Let us consider also the matter of truth with regard to the ***unsaved***. We read that they are destitute of the truth (1 Tim. 6:5). Unbelievers do not obey the truth (Rom. 2:8). Although some unsaved people have come to some knowledge of the truth, they may hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), or are openly opposed to the truth (2 Tim. 3:8). Some even go as far to change the truth of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25). Other unsaved people are said to be ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7).

What then should be our attitude toward truth? We are to think on whatsoever things are true (Phil. 4:8). We are to examine the Scriptures daily so that we might know whether the things we hear are true (Acts 17:11). We are not to love in "word or tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18). We are to be fellow-helpers of the truth (3 John 3, 4), as we walk in the truth (2 John 4), being obedient to the truth (1 Pet. 1:12), as we are girt about with the truth (Eph. 6:14), speaking the truth in love, as we worship God in Spirit and truth (John 4:24).

We are to heed the warnings regarding the truth. Why? For some can go astray from the truth (2 Tim. 2:18) and because we all have a propensity to turn our ears from the truth (2 Tim. 4:4). And for those who go on

sinning wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, can expect a “certain, terrifying expectation of judgment” (Heb. 10:27).

Now, given the emphasis that Scripture places on this matter, should we not be ever mindful, ever vigilant regarding the truth? We should be seeking it out, and checking out ourselves, lest we have gone astray.

C. The view of truth by unbelievers.

Paul wrote of the unsaved that they will be deceived by the man of lawlessness. For through “wicked deception” those who are perishing “refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Those who will be saved on the Day of Judgment will be ones who “love the truth.” Those who will be damned on the Day of Judgment will have “refused to love the truth” that they may be saved.

When Paul wrote to Timothy he addressed the problem of truth deniers who were in the church. Let us read **1 Timothy 6:2-5**:

³If anyone teaches otherwise (i.e. other than sound doctrine) and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, ⁴he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, ⁵useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and *destitute of the truth*, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Those who teach or behave in manner contrary to what Paul had just laid out to Timothy are ones who have serious attitudinal and behavior problems. He seems to speak more about the nature of these ones who are rebels in heart. These ones who reject what he has written and who reject other words of Scripture—“even the words of the Lord Jesus”—are persons who would give Timothy a great deal of difficulty and heartache in the church in which he was serving.

Paul was speaking of ones who are in the church with whom Paul says, “Timothy, you are not going to be able to get along with these people.” The fact is that there always has been and always will be those with whom a relationship is not possible. Their beliefs about God and themselves manifested through their attitudes and actions render them as ones who will always resist you and make your life difficult. The idea that everyone who claims to be Christian is supposed to get along with everyone else who claims to be Christian is simply not biblical. There must be a common set of values, beliefs, and principles if peace is to be maintained. Those who teach other than the truth and “do not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness” will only tear up the church.

Paul was writing specifically of false teachers that Timothy would encounter and have to address. You will recall that our Lord Jesus Himself warned His disciples that they needed to be on their guard for false teachers. **Mark 7:16- 20** reads

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

In this passage we may see the nature of that bad fruit that falls from those who espouse false teaching. It is not simply that they are wrong about certain aspects of doctrine over which we can agree to disagree. These are ones who reject sound doctrine and therefore reveal themselves as ones affected by and infected deeply with great sin.

1. The offenses of those who reject truth (1 Tim. 6:3)

(1) **He teaches contrary to revealed truth**—“If anyone teaches otherwise.” These false teachers have a problem with God’s authority in general. They do not recognize or submit their beliefs and practices to the Word of God. They do not humble themselves when they are shown what God has said in His Word. They resist, perhaps explaining away the text or dismissing with the twisting of another text. They reject the apostles and their teaching. We would say today that if anyone teaches other than what God has revealed in the Holy Scriptures, he is not to be approved of, tolerated, or appeased. His error should be exposed and repudiated.

(2) **He does not consent to “wholesome”, or sound words.** “Sound words” refer to spiritually wholesome words. Sound speaks of that which is solid, dependable, and authoritative. Again, the idea is that the false teacher rejects God’s Word as God’s Word. Here the “wholesome words” are described as *“even the words of our Lord Jesus.”* Paul is not speaking only of the direct speech of the Lord Jesus recorded in the New Testament, the words in “red”; rather he is speaking of Scripture in general. All of Scripture is the Word of God, even the words of the Lord Jesus. It is the Second person of the Blessed Holy Trinity Who has revealed God’s Words to us. The false teacher rejects Scripture as God’s Word.

(3) **He does not embrace doctrine that leads to godliness.** Doctrine, that is, what people believe about God and His dealings and His will, cannot be divorced from behavior. Belief and behavior are related; they are interconnected; they influence one another. You cannot have one right and the other wrong. Good doctrine will bring forth righteous living. False doctrine will result in corrupt living and likewise, sinful living will lead one into false doctrine. Jesus said, “You will recognize false teachers by their fruit, that is, how they live.” If a man teaches doctrine that does not lead to godliness, he is a false teacher and he is spreading false doctrine.

2. The character of those who reject truth

(1) He is **proud**. It is a proud man that dismisses or rejects teaching that comes from the Word of God. He sees himself as having the ability to know what is true and right better than the words that are recorded in the Bible. The false teacher will be a sinfully proud man.

(2) He **knows nothing**. He may be very educated. He may have many degrees and many honors. He may have much “knowledge.” But with regard to God’s truth, “He knows nothing.”

(3) He is obsessed with **disputes and arguments over words**. He resists truth. He always has a comeback. If he cannot refute or dismiss the words of truth, he will try to muddle matters so that the truth becomes unclear and uncertain in the minds of those listening.

We see that these people unsettle other people. When these are given a forum, especially in the church, they bring problems to the body. We see in **verse 4**...

3. The problems that those who reject truth bring to the church

(1) They cause **envy** among people. They promote wrong **attitudes** among the people. Through false teaching people become discontent with their present situation and status. They envy those in authority or those who seem to have it better than them. They become like Miriam and Aaron, who envied Moses’ authority and wanted some of it for them. They said to the people, *“Has the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not spoken also by us?”* They were not denying Moses’ authority, they just wanted equal voice in leading the people of God. The Lord judged them for their sinful ambition.

(2) They cause **strife** among people. Their wrong attitudes generate conflict and discontent. Envy leads to strife. The desire for authority will result in conflict. That is why the Scriptures say, *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”* (Phil. 2:3). The false teachers “envy” others and this leads to strife as they attempt to manipulate and gain authority for themselves.

(3) They cause *reviling* among people. Revilings are spoken words of challenge and opposition. Not only does false teaching lead to envious attitudes, and conflict, it leads to sinful speech.

(4) They cause *evil suspicions* to arise between people. False teachers lead others to mistrust others who are in leadership. James wrote, “For where envying and **strife** is, there is confusion and every evil work” (3:16).

(5) They stir up *the useless wrangling of men*. Dissension, confusion, and conflict result. Peace and contentment in the body is lost.

4. The heart of the problem with these false teachers

(1) These men are of *corrupt minds*. The fact is, they are of *depraved* minds. I believe Paul is saying that they are unregenerate. How can a true Christian be so filled and moved by attitudes and actions that are so contrary to everything that is holy and good? Their minds are set on sensual, selfish things. They want power, authority, and recognition. They are not concerned with the glory of God, what moves them is their own glory. Their whole way of thinking is messed up. They are like Simon Magus who through his behavior revealed that he had no clue as to what true Christianity was like and that his values and desires were so opposed to everything is inherent to the one that is in Christ. When Simon saw that the apostles gave the Holy Spirit to others when they laid their hands on them, he said, “Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” But Peter said to him,

Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity. (Acts 8:20ff)

(2) These men are *destitute of the truth*. This probably speaks of the fact that God has withheld truth from them because of their wicked condition. To know the truth is a gift of God. God must reveal truth and God chooses not to reveal His truth to self-seeking, sinful people. Jesus glorified His Father for His sovereignty in this matter. Jesus said,

I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matt. 11:25ff)

Then there are those who had previously come to truth, but because they refused to order their lives according to the truth they had learned, God removes from their memories what they formerly understood. Jesus said,

For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matthew 13:12).

Now, after considering those who will be damned at Christ’s coming for “they refused to love the truth and so be saved”, let us consider...

II. Those who will be saved, ones who received love for the truth.

The Apostle Paul once expressed his own desire regarding the truth, which is also the desire of every true Christian, who is thinking rightly. He wrote, “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. (2 Cor. 13:8). The reason he could say this is because he possessed a love for the truth regarding the knowledge of God. Now again, we should understand the apostle to be speaking directly about the truth of

the gospel, the good news of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote of the importance of love for the truth of the gospel.

Actually, in order for the gospel to save us from our sin, there are three elements in our apprehension and regard for the truth of the gospel. There must be knowledge of the truth, faith in that knowledge, accompanied with love for the truth of the gospel.

1. There must be *knowledge* of the truth. “Nothing may come to the heart but by the mind” (Thomas Manton). Knowledge of the truth is essential. Our Lord Jesus said, “And you shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). God had sent John the Baptist “to give *knowledge of salvation* to his people in the forgiveness of their sins” (Luke 1:77). Knowledge is essential, but knowledge is not enough.

2. There must be *faith* in that knowledge. Of the Israelites who died in the wilderness, it was said, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Heb. 4:2). They had knowledge, for “indeed the gospel was preached” to them. But they had not faith. They refused to believe that gospel and therefore they failed to enter the Promised Land; they perished in the wilderness. This faith in the knowledge of the truth is always demonstrated in obedience. The Israelites fell under God’s judgment because they disobeyed God’s command to enter the Promised Land. Their disobedience was born of their unbelief.

3. There must be *love* of that knowledge. Again, Paul wrote of the damned, who were “those who are perishing, because *they refused to love the truth* and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:11). .May we strive and pray to receive the love of the truth that is expressed by godly men and women in Scripture. Let us be as the psalmist, who wrote:

¹⁶²I rejoice at Your word
As one who finds great treasure.
¹⁶³I hate and abhor lying,
But I love Your law.
¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise You,
Because of Your righteous judgments.
¹⁶⁵Great peace have those who love Your law,
And nothing causes them to stumble.
¹⁶⁶LORD, I hope for Your salvation,
And I do Your commandments.
¹⁶⁷My soul keeps Your testimonies,
And I love them exceedingly.

Thomas Manton wrote of these three ingredients to saving faith—knowledge, faith, and love:

Well next to faith there must be love, for apprehension and dijudication are acts of the understanding only, but love belongeth to the will, and we must believe with all the heart (Acts 8:37). There may be knowledge without faith, as an heathen may understand the Christian religion, though he believe it not. And there may be faith without love, for there is a ‘dead faith’ (James 2:20), which rests in cold opinions without any affection to the truth believed. Love pierceth deeper into the truth, and maketh it pierce deeper into us. As a red-hot iron, though never so blunt, will run farther into an inch board than a cold tool, though never so sharp. And love maketh it more operative.⁴

III. How may we receive love for the truth?

^{4 4} Thomas Manton, *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 3 (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 80.

The translation of verse 10 in the English Standard Version (ESV) reads, “and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because *they refused to love the truth* and so be saved. But actually the New King James Version gives a better translation of the Greek text. It reads, “those who perish, because they did *not receive the love of the truth*, that they might be saved” (NKJV). Instead of “*they refused the truth*” (ESV), it reads, “*they did not receive* the love of the truth.”⁵ This conveys a truth that is very important. You and I do not have the capability in us to love the truth. Only the Lord can give true love for His Word. This heart within us cannot produce love for His Word. It is a result of God’s grace having been given to us. We are to “receive” from Him this love for the truth that He bestows upon His people whom He is saving from their sin. The love for the truth of God is an aspect of God’s saving grace that He bestows upon His people. God by His grace implants within His people this love for knowing the truth that is in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ as our Prophet who teaches us truth and He is the One who teaches us to love for His truth.

A. How does Christ teach His people?

(1) **Christ as Prophet teaches His people *externally*, by His written Word, the Bible.** And so we read, for example, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet” (Psa. 119:105). Those who pretend to have light or revelation above the Word, or apart from the Word, or contrary to the Word, never had their teaching from Jesus Christ. Because He is the Prophet sent by God the Father and He instructs people by His written Word, the Bible. As Isaiah was told how to identify a false prophet from a true prophet, **Isaiah 8:20** reads, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Therefore if people teach what they claim to be spiritual truth and yet if it is not in accord with the written Word of God, then they have not been taught by Jesus Christ, God’s Prophet, that He has sent to His people.

(2) Christ teaches these sacred mysteries of His Word, inwardly, by the **Holy Spirit** (John 16:13) The Lord told His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit to teach His disciples about these matters. The world knows not the things of God with respect to salvation, for “the natural man receives not the things of God, nor can he know them” (1 Cor. 2:14). And so he knows not what it is to be transformed by the renewing of his mind (Rom. 12:2), or what the inward workings of the Spirit mean; Nicodemus was clueless. These are unsolvable riddles to him. He may have more insight into the things of the world than a believer, but he does not see the deep things of God. As **Thomas Watson** once said, “A swine may see an acorn under a tree, but he cannot see a star in the sky. He who is taught of Christ sees the state secrets, the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.” And so, we need Christ in His prophetic office to reveal to us the truth, and He does so by means of the Holy Spirit.

B. What are the lessons that Christ teaches His people as their Prophet?

(1) Christ teaches us **to know our own hearts**. We read in the Scriptures that the heart is a great sea of deep wickedness, the bottom of which no man can find. The prophet asked rhetorically, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). The rhetorical question demands the answer: “No one can; that is, except God alone. But He must reveal to us in a measure the depths of our own sin or we would never come to see our need for a Savior. When Christ teaches, He removes the veil of ignorance and illuminates a man’s own heart to him. “Then he sees swarms of vain thoughts, he blushes to see how sin mingles with his duties, his stars are mixed with clouds; he prays, as Augustine, that God would deliver him from himself” (Thomas Watson).

(2) Christ teaches us **the vanity of the creature**; that is, Christ teaches us the futility and vanity of the world and living only to attain the things of the world. In other words, Christ causes us or teaches us to no longer desire the fame of the world, or the wealth of the world, or the power of the world, or at least that

⁵ Where the NKJV better translates the clause, “they did not receive the love of the truth”, actually the ESV translated the earlier verb better as a present tense active verb, “are perishing”, rather than the NKJV translation, “who perish.”

which the world offers the sinner. The man untaught by Christ values these things highly, even above his own soul. He is willing to trade His own should for these things. But the one taught by Christ has come to reason rightly, asking of himself, “what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

(3) Christ teaches us to highly prize things unseen, **the eternal things of God**. Christ gives the soul a sight of glory; he gives them a prospect of eternity. The man untaught by Christ only views himself, and today, and maybe a few short years into the future. But the man who is taught of Christ the Prophet looks into eternity, and he begins to govern life according to the things that he has seen. He sees God who is invisible, and he sees eternity before him, and he begins to act and think and respond accordingly. These are all the result of Jesus Christ the Prophet instructing Him. As we read in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “We look not at things which are seen, but at things that are not seen.” And that is the result of Jesus Christ the Prophet teaching His people.

C. How does Christ’s teaching differ from other teaching?

(1) Christ teaches **the heart**. Others may teach the mind, may reach the ear, but Christ teaches the heart. And so we read of Lydia in Acts 16:14, “Whose heart the Lord opened.” And that is what He does through His office as Prophet. And in the same manner Christ opens the heart of all of His people to give attention to their salvation. All that the dispensers of the Word, like myself, can do is but to work knowledge. Only Christ can work grace in the heart. Human teachers can only impart the light of the truth, but only Christ gives the love for the truth, otherwise the words I speak are nothing. The one who is taught of Christ, however, will value the things that I say even though I say them imperfectly and say them in a rather shallow way. The one taught by Christ sees the glory in these things and other aspects of the Word of God is brought to the mind as we talk about these things; that is the function of Christ in His office as Prophet working in His people. Teachers can only teach *what* to believe, Christ *only* can teach how to believe. And this is His function as Prophet.

(2) Christ gives us **a taste (desire) for the Word of God**. Ministers may set the Word before you, and carve it out for you, but only Christ can cause you to taste it. It is one thing to hear a truth preached; it is quite another to taste it and to taste the delight of it, the enjoyment of it. It is one thing to read a promise of Scripture, it is another thing to realize that promise belongs to you, and only Christ as Prophet can teach you that. .

(3) Christ also teaches us to **obey**; He alone can make the sinner obey. Again, I may be able to instruct you what you ought to do, but I cannot produce obedience in you. I can teach you to be humble, but you will remain proud, unless Christ teaches you. When Christ teaches the heart, He removes the obstinacy of that sinner. He not only informs His People of His judgment, but He inclines their will toward Himself. And so in this sense His grace is irresistible. He causes the heart to be humble, and then as a result, they receive grace from God.

(4) Christ teaches us **easily**. He can with the least touch of His Holy Spirit convert the hardest and most ignorant of sinners. And this is one of the greatest blessings of being Reformed. I don’t have to go around looking for someone who seems to be willing; I can preach the Gospel to the drunk in the gutter, knowing that Christ as Prophet can teach him the truth and Christ as King can save him from his sin.

(5) When Christ teaches, **He makes men willing to learn**. Again, ministers may teach others, but the hearers will not learn unless Christ teaches them, because He makes them willing to learn.

(6) Christ teaches not only to illuminate people to the truth, but as one put it, **He also animates**; that is, He makes spiritually alive them that were spiritually dead. He takes the Word of God and as a result spiritual

life appears. A person becomes born anew. They all of a sudden have the light of the Word shining in them, and this is the result of Christ as Prophet working in their souls.

IV. A warning to those who have no love for the truth?

The apostle wrote of this great evil, the man of lawlessness, who would deceive and destroy the souls of many. But we also read of God, who, in His judicial dealings with souls, causes them to be deceived by the deceiver, if they receive not the love of the truth. Verses 11f read, "Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." God's truth, that is His Word, is to be loved and believed. His Word is an expression of His nature, His purposes, even His will. To reject His Word is to reject Him. To fail or refuse to love His Word is a failure and refusal to love Him. He will cause those who disregard Him by disregarding His Words, to be deluded so as to believe "the lie." There is a judicial hardening of souls that should set all people everywhere in a healthy regard and fear of the Lord. Consider the words of the writer of Hebrews:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him... (Heb. 2:1-3).

May we say as John the apostle:

"I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you,
just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."
(3 John 3, 4)
