

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
March 2021

(added progressively for each Sunday)

(see following pages)

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
What the Future Holds

per S Olyott

2 Thessalonians 2:1b-2a

¹ ... we ask you, brothers and sisters, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, ...

Paul has been telling these Christians, who have been Christians only for a short while, that it's worth going on in the Christian life. He told them in the first chapter that Jesus Christ is coming again. And when He comes all people who don't know God because they haven't obeyed the Gospel, will be punished – everlastingly. Christians: they will be rewarded and taken into glory! So there is this great division (which exists already) which is going to become visible. Terrible and glorious!

But we all know that when one starts to talk about the second coming, there are all sorts of strange ideas around. Even in the time of the Apostles there were people who had very strange ideas about the second coming.

So Paul writes now, to correct certain wrong ideas. In doing so he gives us a strong warning. So we are to see an Apostolic warning. After that warning he then gives us the history of the Christian church from his time, right through to the end of time. He will explain that this history will be in three stages. So we see that this is a very important passage! In following this understanding, that Paul gives us, we will be freed from all sorts of misunderstandings. Which still exist in the church today.

Let us review verses 1 and 2 with the beginning of verse 3, because here we have that Apostolic warning: *¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let no one deceive you in any way.*

What was happening was that there were people in the early church who were saying, "God's spoken to me. I've had a revelation. My revelation is in line with what the Apostles themselves teach: the Lord has already come!" If that sounds like a strange idea to you, just remember that the Jehovah Witnesses' teach that Jesus Christ did come back in 1914. Invisibly, but really!

That sort of idea already existed in the time of the Apostles. At that time there were people in the church agreeing with the false ideas. "We've seen a letter, written by Paul, that says that Jesus Christ has already come back." Other people were saying that it's true, they also had heard Paul and Silas and Timothy saying that the Lord had come back.

But Paul says, "Don't be troubled by all this, don't *be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed*. If you hear that someone has had a revelation or someone has seen a letter or saying that that's what we said. Don't believe it. Don't be troubled by all that!

The guiding principle: Don't except anything unless you can know 100% that it is actually from the Apostles. If it's just a rumour; or a letter that you've never seen; or a revelation whose source you can't determine. Unless you're 100% sure that the teaching you received is from the Apostles, don't accept it!"

Now this teaching is relevant today. We are not to accept any teaching, whatever its source, unless we are 100% certain that it comes from an Apostle.

Why is it, that we accept the 39 books of the Old Testament, but we don't accept the Apocrypha¹ as the word of God. Why is that? The plainly known reason is that the Jews had a known collection of books (scrolls), numbering 39. Our Lord only ever accepted those books as Scripture. He never even mentioned the others (since they were probably written between 200BC and 400AD). The Apostles took note of that and they also only referred to the known collection of Books as Scripture. So we are 100% certain that these are the books recognised by the Apostles. But not 100% certain about any other books.

Then, applying the guiding principle: we only accept the 39 books of the Old Testament! No part of the Apocrypha, because this principle remains true throughout the whole history of the Christian Church. You have to know and be 100% certain that anything is Apostolic before you accept it.

So why do we accept the 27 books of the New Testament, and not the pseudepigrapha?² Which most have never heard of: Thank God!

Because every book that we have was either written by an Apostle or was written under the direct superintendence of an Apostle: Matthew was an Apostle; Mark wasn't – but we know for certain that he wrote under the surveillance of Peter; Luke was not an Apostle – but we know for certain that he laboured in collaboration with Paul; John was an Apostle; and so on.

So we accept the 27 books of the New Testament because we know for certain that they are Apostolic. So the principle applies.

Of course the same applies to 'spiritual gifts': When the Apostles went into the early world and preached, wherever they went, because the whole Scripture was not yet in the hands of those churches which they formed and because the Church must live on (in) Jesus Christ, God raised up in every church different spiritual gifts. God revealed His mind to the early church through prophesy, the special gift of knowledge and the gift of tongues – which **was** interpreted.

The Apostles had the power to transmit those gifts and did so. But the people who received them did not have the power in turn to transmit them to another generation, and didn't do so. We can know for certain that certain gifts, like the ones in Corinth, came from a church that was Apostolic. We can't know today. Nobody can be 100% certain today, that prophesy in the church or the gift of tongues, or the interpretation of tongues, or the special gift of knowledge is Apostolic. It is impossible to be 100% certain. So because it's impossible to be 100% certain, it's impossible for the human in-

1 The **biblical apocrypha** (from the [Ancient Greek](#): ἀπόκρυφος, [romanized](#): *apókryphos*, [lit.](#) 'hidden') denotes the collection of [apocryphal](#) ancient books thought to have been written some time between 200 BC and 400 AD.[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)[\[5\]](#)

2 [Pseudepigrapha are falsely attributed works, texts whose claimed author is not the true author, or a work whose real author attributed it to a figure of the past.](#)

tellec to accept those examples as spiritual gifts. (What is impossible to 'man' is always possible to God, of course.)

Paul says that you've got to grasp and apply the principle. Because if you don't you will be deceived. That's why he says, verse 3, ³ *Let no one deceive you in any way.* That is his Apostolic warning! So everything must be tested: am I 100% sure that it is Apostolic – then I embrace it. If I'm only 99% sure – I don't embrace it! It's the only way to save yourself from spiritual catastrophe. Says Paul.

Having said that, he – an Apostle – now gives us teaching about the 'day of the Lord'. In doing so, he – an Apostle – describes to us, in summary form, the whole history of the Christian church. Here is what the Apostles themselves thought about the history of the Christian church.

We're going to notice that this history is in three stages: there is the 'present stage' where *the mystery of lawlessness is already at work* (Verse 7); then there is the next stage, when the man of lawlessness (sin) appears; only then, the last stage, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and he destroys the man of lawlessness.

Stage 1 (verse 7): ⁷ *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.* Now Paul talks about this here while John talks about it in his first letter. One day we're going to see evil personified in one man, but in the meantime we see all those things – not yet personified in a man – rampant in the world. One day we're going to see iniquity encapsulated in an individual. But in the meantime iniquity is rampant in the world. And says Paul. "We're going to see more and more of it."

Verse 3: The church of Jesus Christ which carries His Name will sink into apostasy (*the rebellion comes first*). That apostasy will be general at the time when Jesus Christ comes back. In fact He will not come back until this happens. ³ ... *For that day will not come, unless the rebellion (also called 'the falling away' in the KJV³) comes first,*

So the first stage of the History of the Christian church will see the church progressively losing its grip. Becoming more and more apostate and degenerate. We will see lawlessness increasing and increasing until at last we see that lawlessness personified in the man of sin (son of destruction; son of perdition).

This first stage of church history, is marked, says Paul, "By two great strands. Two things will be happening at the same time. On the one hand apostasy (verse 3). Apostasy as you know is turning your back on what God has said. We're going to see all this in a man and that man (in verse 7) is called 'lawless'. But the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. We're going to see in that man: lies. So this implies that in this first stage lead up, to the actual anti-Christ⁴, we will see more and more lies. That man when he comes will be unrighteous and deceitful. So we will see more and

3 This family of Greek words is analysed as follows: **ἀποστασία, ἀποστασίας**, ἡ (ἀφίσταμαι), a falling away, defection, apostasy; in the Bible namely, from the true religion: [Acts 21:21](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:3](#);

4 This title for the 'man of sin and destruction' is not used by Paul. Paul depicted this impostor as a base parody of the true Christ – as the antithesis of Christ. Although Paul himself did not use the term, 'antichrist' (used by John in his first letter: 1 John 2:18,22; 4:3) is a fitting synonym. The fate of this impostor is sealed: he will be destroyed at the coming of Christ

more unrighteousness and more and more deception. When that man comes what will be general is a refusal to love the truth (verse 10).

So we will see more and more of the mystery of lawlessness, the spirit of the antichrist at work. There will be more and more refusal to love the truth. The followers of that man will be given over to a strong delusion so that they believe a lie (verse 11). So that implies that when the mystery of lawlessness is at work, people will more and more easily, more and more widely, believe lies. They won't believe in the truth, so when the spirit of the antichrist is at work, truth (the Gospel) will be more and more refused and unrighteousness will be more and more loved.

One strand then, is that the world will be increasingly wicked. The other strand is this question of miracles. When the antichrist comes, the man of sin, he's going to work lying miracles (*false signs and wonders*, verse 9). That implies therefore that during the time of the spirit of the antichrist (the spirit of lawlessness) one of the characteristics of this 'waiting time', will be more and more *false signs and wonders*, (lying miracles). The miracles that he will do (verse 9) will be great acts of power, but *false signs and wonders*, done through the power of Satan. That then will next be encapsulated in a man. But the way for this second stage is being prepared by these things being seen before they are personified in one particular person. Unfortunately people will come to think that these lying wonders are a proof of the truth. In fact their only proof will be that of error!

Be aware then of what Paul is saying: we are still in stage 1. This man has not come yet – that will be stage 2! But the spirit of lawlessness is already at work and is increasing. There will be immorality as one strand, and lying miracles as the other. These are the two great features of this first stage, in the history of the Church. It is clear that we are still living in that first stage. In fact approaching the end of it! There has never been such widespread lawlessness and contempt for authority as we see in the wide, world at the moment.

There has never been a church that is so universally apostate – turning its back on the revealed Word of God. And there has never been so many lying wonders, miracles and signs. We are absolutely surrounded by these now.

Next week then, with today's exposition as an introduction, we will look to specific examples of these *false signs and wonders*, which are so much more common today than ever before. Specifically we will consider: Prophecy; tongues; healing – particularly inner-healing; and the charismatic movement.

[2030]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

What the Future Holds – Part 2

per S Olyott

2 Thessalonians 2:1a

¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,

We began last week by recognising that there was in verse 3 an Apostolic Warning. ³ *Let no one deceive you in any way.* And the way not to be deceived is to test everything and be 100% sure that it comes from the Apostles.

The particular deception that Paul was dealing with was to do with the Second Coming of Christ. So the passage continued with a short history of the Christian church from Paul's time to that Second Coming – the end of time.

There are three stages. Stage 1 is the period beginning with the incarnation of Christ; through Paul's time; continuing to our time; and beyond. This stage throughout is characterised by **the mystery of lawlessness being at work**. While in our present time: There has never been a church that is so universally apostate – turning its back on the revealed Word of God. And there has never been so many **lying wonders, miracles and signs**. We are absolutely surrounded by these now.

So this week we pick up the exposition, with some present day specific examples of these *false signs and wonders*, which are so much more common today than ever before. Specifically we will consider: Prophecy; tongues; healing – particularly inner-healing; and the charismatic movement.

Some examples: Prophecy. In the Bible prophecy is infallible. Modern Prophecy makes mistakes. Biblical prophecy is predictive, modern prophecy tries not to be and talks about finality. Biblical prophecy is verifiable, modern prophecy isn't. It is a lying spirit!

Take the gift of tongues. In Biblical tongues the speaker understands what he is saying. In modern tongues it's no different from the tongues of Islam, Buddhists or occult worshippers. They don't understand what they say. Their mind is 'switched off'.

Let's consider healing. Biblical healing is immediate, entire, perfect and lasting. Modern healing, falsely in the Name of Jesus Christ, walks past deformed children; turns a 'blind eye' to youngsters with Down Syndrome; has nothing to say to people who haven't a limb. They concentrate on banal healing – which for the most part are unverifiable. All those resurrections from the dead, that we may hear about, take place it seems in unknown places in Indonesia! In our day it is given more and more to the occult practice of 'inner healing'.

The whole thing is an enormous trick. A 'confidence trick'. A lie. The father of all lies is the devil and therefore we can conclude that when these various practices, when present in the Charismatic movement, show it to be Satanic.

But things are not yet as bad as they could be. Because there is, "Something restraining", says Paul (verse 6). There is something holding back evil. It's not as rampant as it could be. There's something holding back evil from being personified in a single individual. "This", says Paul, verse 5, "has been the teaching of the Apostles from the first!"

That's the first stage of Church history. Now we go to the second stage: The second stage of church history is: that which restrains evil from being encapsulated in a single man of sin, will be taken out of the way. Look carefully at verses 6 and 7.

⁶ *And you know **what** is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time.*

⁷ *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only **he** who now restrains it will do so until **he** is out of the way.*⁵

What is restraining evil from blasting forth and showing itself in a single man in verse 6 is a 'what', while in verse 7 it's a 'he'. So what is it that stops the 'man of sin', coming? What is it that stops evil blasting forth? It is something that is a 'what' (verse 6) and a 'he' (verse 7). The Thessalonians knew what it was: ⁶ *And you know what is restraining him now ...* (verse 6) If the Thessalonians knew what it was, then presumably we can know as well.

What was it in the first century which stopped evil bursting over the barriers and over the banks and flooding the world? 'What' was it that held evil in? Which is also called a 'he'? It could only be one thing. The Thessalonians didn't even have to guess, because all around them there was something that was described as a 'what' and in the other breath, as a 'he'. Just as for example in Britain. Who prosecutes you if you offend the State? The Crown. There it is: a person who prosecutes you, standing for the State – a what.

Similarly, the Roman Empire was both a 'what' and a 'he'. Sometimes they said that the Empire, 'says', at others they would say that Caesar, 'says'. Or that the law of the Empire, 'is', but equally that Caesar's law, 'is'. Normal speech could go very easily from one to the other. A 'what' to a 'he' and a 'he' to a 'what'. At that time the restraining influence was the Roman State. So that evil didn't break out in all its fullness. [Remember Paul has said: Romans 13:1 ¹ *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* This he says, despite the inadequacies and injustices that Paul was well aware of.]

Why was it so important for the Romans to have 'law and order'? Because they were surrounded by other nations that wanted to conquer them. They knew that if their empire didn't have cohesion they would be overcome. It was essential for them to have law and order to maintain their safety and superiority. But one day law and order will be thrown to the wind. And the idea of separate empires and nations will be thrown to the wind. The whole spirit of anti-Christ is the spirit of lawlessness. The spirit of anti-

⁵ At this point Olyott uncharacteristically criticises the NKJV (American Edition) because it capitalises "he"!

Christ is not only leading to one man, but also one world.⁶ When law and order have been thrown to the wind. When the idea of separate nations is abandoned and man's quest is 'one world'. At that moment we will see on the scene the great individual who is mentioned here.

So let's look at 'him', the man of sin. What is he like? Verse 3: Well he is a man! So if he breaks forth in our generation let's remember that he is – just a man. That's all he is. However, he's a 'lost' man, he's called the 'son of perdition' (see Bible footnote (3)). Verse 4: He's the enemy of the Gospel, ⁴ *who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship*, Putting himself not only above Christianity, but also above all religions. Then he makes himself the object of worship, ⁴ *... so that he takes his seat in the temple of God*. In order to pass himself off as God. Telling himself that he is God.

When this man comes what do you think he will do to the true Church? He's a man; a lost man; he's against the Gospel; he believes he's in charge of all religions; he believes that he himself should be the object of worship; and he tries to pass himself off as God. What do you think he will do to the true Church when he comes?

[When the reformed theologians who composed the Westminster Confession wrote, it seemed to them that a Pope was the most likely origin of an anti-Christ, because for many centuries the pronouncements of the Roman Church had demonstrated these characteristics in their pontiff. Their doctrines confirmed this.]

They hold that their Pope holds three crowns: It is believed that he is King of the Church – that is all who call themselves Christians; the King of the world – that all governments should submit to him; and the King of hell!

Look carefully at verse 4: ⁴ *... he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God*. The Pope calls himself the 'vicar of Christ'. What is a vicar? A vicar is somebody who takes the place of somebody else. But the only 'vicar of Christ' is the Holy Spirit. Yet the Pope takes this title to himself.

Consider Jerusalem, the night before the Crucifixion: Here is our Lord with the Disciples, praying that wonderful prayer of John 17. The blessed Son of God is speaking to His eternal Father, in the intimacy of the Holy Trinity. The Second Person of the Trinity says to the First Person of the Trinity, "Father, righteous Father, Holy Father."⁷ Holy Father! The title which the Son of God gives to His Father is taken by an earthly institution and applied to the Bishop of Rome. That is a great wickedness. The greater wickedness is that the Bishop of Rome accepts that title!

So it can be claimed that there is nobody in the world more wicked than the Pope of Rome – so far. Because He takes to Himself the title of God. Being thus an embodiment of evil.

6 The Red (extreme 'left' Socialists) and Green agitators have a 'platform' of one world Government – theirs – which will be brought about by fostering a notion (true or not) of a global catastrophe that will propel the human race – like lemmings – to join them in their purpose. Satan's purpose.

7 John 17:11b: ¹¹ *... Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.*

If you find this hard to accept start reading Roman Catholic documents: you will find before very long: *Dominus Deus Noster Papa* – the Lord God our Pope. Then a little later: *Alter Deus in Terris* – another God upon Earth. Also: *idem est regnum Dei e Papa* – the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the Pope is one and the same thing.

So a Pope is one possibility for the origin of the coming anti-Christ. None the less he will certainly be a Charismatic. Verse 9: ⁹ *The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,...* This great figure when he comes upon the scene, he will do miracles. He will do them of course through his satanic power. The effect of those miracles will be disastrous upon the world.

Verse 10 tells us that people will be taken in by this seduction. ¹⁰ *and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.* People will be dazzled by what he does. What he will do in the Name of God. He will lead people along the road to hell as all his precursors and forerunners have done. As we see at the end of verse 10, the only thing that will stop you being deceived by him will be the love of the truth, which God chooses to give to the chosen at some stage in their earthly life.

If you don't love the truth, this is the proof that you are still lost.

In verse 11: If you chose not to love the truth, then God will hasten you along the path of error that you have chosen. You will be condemned because you didn't believe the truth, but instead had pleasure in unrighteousness. Paul is talking bluntly to the Christian church. He's saying to us all, that very difficult days are coming. Professing Christians, either go the way of the crowd and the majority – which is an easy road. It's also a way of satanic miracles. And it's the way of untruth and error, injustice and unrighteousness and hell.

Or love the truth, live holy lives, perhaps suffer terribly, and go to heaven. There is no other option.

Which brings us to the third stage.

The third stage in church history is mentioned in verse 8. ⁸ *And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.* The glorious truth in the Scripture as we have often had cause to mention, is that when evil is at it's height, then God chooses to break it. When the man of sin is ruling the world and the professing church. While all eyes are upon him and worshipping him. When evil is absolutely pervasive. It's at that moment that Our Lord Jesus Christ will Come. Our Lord won't have to speak or wage warfare on him. He will simply breathe on him and with the brightness of His coming He will completely destroy this man. He will be completely gone.

The great future which is before us is in verse 1, *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, ...* If we look at tomorrow, we will be scared, because the progression of evil is such that tomorrow will be even more immoral than today. There will be even more miracles and lying wonders tomorrow than today.

Those will be the great two strands. If we look a little further into history (past 'tomorrow') we will be terrified. With the man of sin, who is doing the work of Satan, being unloosed. Christians in prison, mutilated and killed. Frankly there is little evidence that the Christian community is taking this teaching seriously and preparing for those days.

When those days come it will not be little ditties and pretty songs, that will hold up your faith no matter how much you might like them. When those days come it will be a thorough knowledge of the Word of God and a true life of prayer that is going to hold you up. Nor is there much evidence that this, is the preparation which Christians are being involved in.

If you look at tomorrow you may be scared; and if you look further you might well be terrified. Which is why Paul says don't look at either ultimately, but lift your eyes above it all and look at the last day. He IS coming back! The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is a fact. There will be a gathering together with Him. That's why it is worth, even in awful days – worth persevering.

[2319]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

The Perseverance of the Saints (b)

per S Olyott

Luke 8:15

15 As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with endurance.

The final two weeks of our occasional series interlude called the 5 Points of the (Biblical) Compass.

We have seen that the Bible is a book from God and is about God. It's also about mankind. We have seen that man is lost. Total Depravity: sin has gone into every part of man's nature. Everything he is or hopes to be.

We have seen that God has chosen certain men and women to be saved. To be His children. To be His people. He did it not because of anything in them, but for reasons which were all His own. That's Unconditional Election.

When the Lord Jesus Christ died He actually saved those people He didn't just make it possible. He actually did redeem them on the Cross. That's called Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement.

Then we find that all the people that God the Father chose and for whom Jesus died, actually come to enjoy their salvation. They enter into the experience of it, as the Holy Spirit works on their life. That's called Irresistible Grace.

Then in a recent two weeks we were tremendously heartened to learn that all those chosen by the Father; bled for by the Son; and called by the Spirit can never be lost. They never need to fear being lost. They will end up in heaven! This introduces the 5th Point of the Compass: Perseverance of the saints. But now we must consider and accept the second part of this point, today and in a few week's time.

We have already seen from just a sample of the available Bible texts that if you are truly chosen by the Father; bled for by Christ; called by the Spirit. If you are a Christian man or woman, boy or girl, you may never fear being lost. That's only half of this final point, here is the other half:

You can't know for certain whether you're chosen, bled for and called, unless you actually continue persevering in your Christian faith, throughout your life, until the very end. You don't need to fear being lost, because no true child of God will ever be lost, but you can't have any grounds for believing that you are a true child of God unless you persevere and persevere, go on and on, and on in your Christian life. Christians fight the good fight with all their might! If you stop fighting the good fight with all your might, it's possible that you are a 'backslider'. In which case, in later years, God will bring you back to fighting the good fight again.

Or it's possible that you are an apostate! Some one who initially believes themselves to be a true Christian, but actually succeeds in permanently walking out on it all. Which proves that they were never a true Christian in the first place.

That's where we have come to so far. As we proceed there will be three sections: a part of logic; an examination of Bible passages; and the practical outcomes for us.

a. Logic. This truth should not surprise us. Why did God the Father choose His people? Why did the Lord Jesus Christ die for them? Why did the Holy Spirit call them?

At this point we look at three texts:

- Ephesians 1:4 Consider the Father choosing: ⁴ *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ...*

God the Father chose His people to be a holy people. So if you're not walking the road of holiness. If you're not progressing along the road of holiness. What ground have you got for believing that you are one of those chosen people?

- Titus 2:14 Speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ *who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*

If today, you say that you are a Christian and you commit lawless deeds; if today you say that you are a Christian, but you're playing with impurity; if today you say that you are a Christian, but you are not zealous (keen) for good works: what grounds do you have for believing that you are one of those people for whom the Saviour bled?

- Now to the Old Testament. Ezekiel 36:26-27. Here Ezekiel looks through the long centuries up to the coming of Christ and the blessings Christ will bring. Including the great blessing of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. ²⁶ *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.* ²⁷ *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my just decrees.*

So if you're not walking in God's statutes; you're not keeping God's just decrees; if you're not doing what God's Word says, what grounds do you have for believing that you're one of those people for whom the Holy Spirit called?

God the Father chose His people to be holy, so if you're not holy you can't be sure that you are actually one of the chosen.

God the son bled for them that they might be pure, so if you are not walking the road to purity, you can't be sure that you are one of them.

God the Holy Spirit works in them to make them obedient, so if you are deliberately disobedient, you can't be sure that you are one of them.

The only ground that you have for firmly believing, that you are a chosen, purchased and called sinner, is that you are persevering and continuing in spiritual things and that you keep at it, and at it, and at it, throughout your earthly life.

It's utterly impossible for one of the true people of God to be lost. But there are many people who believe themselves to be among the true people of God, but are not! Lest you are in danger of fooling yourself note the Bible when it entreats you to *make your calling and election sure*⁸.

So that is section 1. To show that this truth shouldn't surprise us.

- Now a selection of passages in the New Testament showing that this aspect of the final perseverance of the saints is plainly taught in the Word of God. In 'black on white' on the pages of Scripture.
- We begin with the teaching of Jesus: Matthew 7:18. Our earlier reading began at verse 13 and went to the end of that chapter. Jesus began with a warning: He said that there is only a narrow road which leads to life, but a very wide road that leads to destruction. And that there are only these two roads. Then He went on at verse 18 ¹⁸ *A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.*
If God has really changed your heart, it will remain changed. If God has not changed your heart, there can be some temporary changes but they won't be permanent. You know a tree by its fruit. A good tree can't bring forth a bad fruit of permanent backsliding. A good tree can't bring forth the bad fruit of walking out on the Christian faith. A good tree can't bring forth the bad fruit of walking distantly from God throughout life.

But go further, look look at verse 21: ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, (Not everyone who believes himself to be a Christian is going to go through the 'pearly gates'.) but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

It's not what you say about yourself, which proves you're a Christian. It's how you stand in relation to God's revealed will.

Then He goes on: (this is not a parable. It's a prediction!) ²² *On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

It's even possible to prophesy in Jesus Name – He doesn't say it was a false prophecy! Possible to prophesy in Jesus Name. It's also possible to cast out demons, in the Name of Jesus Christ. And He doesn't say they weren't successful in casting out. It's possible to do miracles in Christ's Name. He doesn't say that the miracles were fake. All this and still be lost yourself!

Because it's not spiritual gifts or spiritual powers, that prove that you are a true Christian. These people were lost because they practised lawlessness. They were not going on and on and on in their obedience to the decrees of

8 From 2 Peter 1:10. Study note from the Reformation Study Bible. **make your calling and election sure.** Literally, "make sure for yourself your calling and election." While God's choice of the elect is firm and certain to Himself (Eph 1:4-6), it is not immediately obvious to human beings. Assurance of God's call comes through the internal testimony of the Spirit in our hearts (Gal 4:6) in conjunction with the experience of His work in our lives (vv, 5-7). See WCF 3:8; 17:1; 18:3. – and so on.

God. Try were living unholy lives. When God changes us, He changes our nature. We're never perfect – far from it, but the overall trend of the believer's life is holiness, purity, godliness, heavenly-ness. Graph of progress, if it could be drawn, would show a fairly up and down characteristic. But the overall movement of the graph would be upwards. Nearer to Him. Further along the road of holiness and spiritual things.

Now we're all familiar with the parable of the sower. Turn now to Luke Chapter 8:5-15, to note the Lord's teaching. Verse 15 is the crucial verse. Some people when they hear the Word of God, they forget it at once; some people when they hear the Word of God: they are keen about it for a little while but then they drop it as quickly as they took it up; some people when they hear the Word of God, they seem like there is something wonderful happening in their lives, but there is something else that is growing up in their lives and it eventually becomes bigger.

The only true Christians are the fourth sort, of whom we read in verse 15:
¹⁵ *As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience* (endurance⁹). In this case only, the Word of God takes root; it is never plucked up; it takes root and grows; it takes root and nothing strangles it; the Word of God takes root and the fruit of a changed character is seen. They bear that fruit with patient endurance, – (also called in some translations) perseverance! Those are the true Christians!

Come now to John chapter 8. It's very important that we grasp the truth of this aspect of the final perseverance of the saints. Some people believe that if you just made a decision at a 'meeting', then you may live as you please, and you're safe for eternity. You might be very unhappy as a Christian but none the less you're safe. This is not true! When God saves people He changes them! Whoever has a new record in heaven has a new heart on earth. Whoever is made right with God is then different in character. Always different. Despite all their falls and failings.

The passage can surprise and even frighten some believers. At verse 30,
³⁰ *As he was saying these things, many believed in him.* But later in the chapter, at verse 44, Jesus said to members of exactly the same audience: ⁴⁴ *You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.*¹⁰ One minute we hear that people are believing Him and then He points out there are those that are diabolical – they are still in the hands of the devil. So it is seen that there can be faith (belief) but which, for some, is not a saving faith.

9 The first use noted in the New Testament for the Greek word, **hupomone** (hoop-om-on-ay) 1. steadfastness, constancy, endurance (Vulg. in [1 Thessalonians 1:3](#)sustinentia, in [James 5:11](#)sufferentia); in the N. T. the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings: [Luke 8:15](#); and others ...

10 This reading continues: *He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* ⁴⁵ *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.* ⁴⁶ *Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?* ⁴⁷ *Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."*

There's such a thing as a certain believing in Christ, which is not a saving believing in Christ. (After all the devil knows all there is to know about Christ.) So there is then a desire to know if one's faith is the true faith or this apparent faith that passes for the real thing. How does one know if they are a real disciple or not? The answer is in verse 31: ³¹ *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide (to persevere¹¹) in my word, you are truly my disciples,* ¹²

The point: the point is that the true saving faith is not something that happens at a certain place, in a certain time at a certain date. It may start then but it doesn't finish then. Saving faith has a start, but does not have a finish – it goes throughout life. We come to Christ that day and we come to Christ every day. We repent that day and we repent every day. We believe that day and we believe every day. We embrace Christ that day and we embrace Him every day. It's the first day of a whole new series of days, which last right until the grave. That's saving faith.

If the day ever comes when I stop repenting, stop believing in Christ, stop coming to Christ, stop embracing Christ, stop following Christ, I know then that I just had that temporary – maybe impressive – faith. Not that soul-saving transformation of which the New Testament speaks.

As long as I continue in the faith I can enjoy Christian assurance. But the moment I stop continuing in the faith, I have no further right to assurance.

For now we pause. In several weeks time we will continue with section 2: where we continue to show the teaching of the Bible on the Perseverance of the saints. We will recommence with John 15.

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**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

(ASIDE: The above treatment of the verses from John chapter 8 were introduced by Olyott as having had a disturbing effect on him, especially when he was young. Similarly many of us may have been frightened. It is easy to come away with the feeling that we have no hope. And knowing our own weakness we are justified in this. But what is being laid out for us in the Scriptures (as in many cases) is the 'what if'. If we exhibit the negative characteristics then ...

But in all such cases, it is not up to our strength or ability – *"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."* The truly chosen elect Christian lives the Christian life with perseverance to the end with and only with God's power working on and in that Christian. That is our hope!)

11 equivalent to **to persevere**; ἐν τίνι, of him who cleaves, holds fast, to a thing: ἐν τῷ λόγῳ, [John 8:31](#);

12 This reading continues: ³² *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

1 Corinthians 11:2, 17-34

This Do in Remembrance of Me

Imagine if our Lord Jesus, on the night before His arrest and crucifixion, had gathered His closest disciples and shown them a worship practice by which they were to remember Him after He was gone. This ordinance would also serve to promote a spiritual bond among the believers and enshrine the meaning of the death Jesus was about to endure. We can only imagine how significant these instructions would be to the disciples in the years to come and how important a role this worship practice would play in the life of the church.

Those familiar with the Gospel accounts will realise that this is not a hypothetical situation. Jesus did, in fact, establish a sacred worship practice – a sacrament – that would centre the Christian faith upon His atoning death and unite the believers in their communion with Him during all the long years between His death and His second coming. ... This sacrament, the Lord's Supper, has indeed occupied a central role in the faith and practice of the church.¹³

Many believers, especially in contemporary evangelical Christianity, have confused ideas about this sacrament, being largely ignorant of the theology poured into and out from it. Thus they risk failing to derive assurance and comfort nor seek grace from participating in it.

There are possibly two explanations for the confusion. However both are poor excuses:

- The spectre of Roman Catholicism, with its mysticism and ritualistic devotion to the Mass is one. Causing evangelicals to define themselves in opposition to Rome rather than in conformity to the Bible.
- Alternatively, at the other extreme, is the evangelicals' devotion to the Bible as the principal **means of grace**. Our proper emphasis on believing Bible truth, coupled to an over emphasis on evangelism at the expense of the means for Christian growth (discipleship), produces a coolness towards the Bible's advocacy for sacramental grace.

The challenge set before today's evangelicals, and especially those who embrace Reformed Theology, is that we should give the Lord's Supper the place intended for it by our Lord. This will mean still affirming a primacy in our ministry of the Word of God, as demonstrated in the practice of the Apostles. But it also means restoring to our worship and our approach to spiritual growth a grateful and believing partaking of the Supper of our Lord.¹⁴

The means of Grace:

¹³ Phillips, Richard D. *What is the Lord's Supper?* Basics of the Reformed Faith Series, page 5

¹⁴ Ibid., page 6

Having asserted that the Word is the principal means of grace, whereby we receive the gift of spiritual life, by the Spirit, through the Word, and are sanctified and equipped for service through the Word, do we really need any other means to strengthen, encourage and establish us in the faith? If the Word can perform all these functions, what use is there for any other means of grace? If we are able to place confidence in the power of the Word (by the Spirit) to change lives and to equip for us for evangelism, is there a need for the sacraments in addition?

The answer can depend on the approach taken to the question.

Throughout the course of Christian history and by a survey of current practices it is found that there are many different approaches. The answer depends on the approach that is used.

- **Mysticism:** No relevance or place for the sacraments (together with a diminishing of the importance of the Word) is inherent here. Proponents of this approach, throughout the ages and particularly today, have argued that the ONLY means of grace is the internal (without the Word) operation of the Spirit upon the souls of believers. They believe that God gives immediate knowledge of Himself directly to the soul by the Spirit. The extreme of this approach is seen in the Quakers.
- **Roman Catholic:** Although 'mystic' or superstitious, in some of their practices, this tradition holds almost the reverse position from the category above, in that they recognise only one true communion through which grace is dispensed, namely the body of Christ which is the church. Further, only a priest of this church is able to mediate the blessings that are specifically conveyed in the sacraments of baptism and the Mass. (and the additional 5 sacraments that they include). They believe that we receive grace in a more or less mechanical manner through the sacraments (*ex opere operato, i.e. -through the act performed*).
- **Rationalistic Christians:** Some Christians, especially within the evangelical community have come to the view that there is no other means of grace apart from the written and preached word of God (made effective by the Spirit of God working in the 'heart' of the believing Christian). They believe that the Bible alone, whether it is read, spoken, or preached, is the only true means of grace. Some acknowledge the two ordinances as merely commemorative and only serve a memorial function, where we simply call to mind the benefits that Christ has brought to us.
- **The Reformed View:** However there is another view that developed at the time of the Reformation: that the sacraments were more than mere symbols. In addition to fulfilling a representative function by signifying grace, they also 'seal' grace to the believer. As with the *type*, of circumcision, in the Old Testament, foreshadowing the sacraments of the New, they are a *sign* and *seal*. (Romans 4:11) A *sign* that the believer belongs to the company of faith, the church, and a *seal* (or guarantee) of God's grace that is appropriated by His gift of faith. The reformers, at least those who were followers of Calvin and the Continental Reformers, believe that Christians receive grace through the ministry of the Word of God and the application of that Word of God by the Holy Spirit, and through the sacraments. And that the sacraments can never be divorced from the Word of God. The bare *sign* itself must always be accompanied by the Word of God.

This explains why Protestant ministers are often referred to as 'ministers of the Word and sacrament' and why Reformed churches insist that the sacraments should almost always be administered in the context of a normal service of worship where the Word of God is proclaimed and also serves to interpret the meaning of the sacraments when they are being administered.¹⁵

What benefit does the communicant receive through the Lord's Supper?

Considering the physical example which is used by God to dispense His grace: we can see that the elements of bread (food) and 'wine' (drink) support and maintain the physical body. The body already exists but it requires these to continue to live and prosper. This we readily understand. In God's wisdom He reminds us as we eat and drink these elements of this process.

However, as with Christ's physical acts of mercy with the people He met, such as the man born physically blind, He used the physical to teach a spiritual meaning. The blind man not only received physical sight but also spiritual discernment. In the case of the Lord's Supper the spiritual outcome is that we are directed through the physical analogy to recognise, remember, celebrate and be thankful for the support and maintenance of our new existence (new birth) in Christ brought about by His 'broken body' – signified by the bread, and His 'spilt blood' – signified by the wine. It is by the continual application of Christ's finished work and sacrifice that our spiritual existence continues and prospers. The Lord's Supper is such a means of grace, especially when conducted in the context of and with the understanding brought about by the Word of God.

What the communicant 'feeds on' then is not the body of Christ as such, but the sanctifying benefits that He offers through His atoning death.

Christ's body is not physically present in any way (by, in, under or over the bread and wine), but as He explained to the disciples (John 16:7) *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*

It is the Spirit of Christ that is in us as we 'communicate' with Him and each other (as His 'body' the Church), during our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Confession teaches that the conception of saving faith is not the work of the sacraments: (14:1) *The grace of faith by which the chosen are empowered to believe for their salvation, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is normally produced by the service of the Word. By this and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it (the grace of Faith) is increased and strengthened.* For our spiritual nurture and our proper Christian growth.

Above all the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is an ordinance: that is it is a command of Christ. "Do this in remembrance of me." – until He comes.

[1490]

May this belief be so for all the saints gathered here today.