

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

We live in the last days. We live in the times prophesied of old, the days before the end. Each generation of Christians has seen the signs. But in our age they are more prominent than before. The godlessness, the violence, the hatred, the anger, the disregard for human life, the exaltation of man as his own savior, the pervasiveness of false doctrine, and the evil of our age all testify to the times in which we live.

St. Paul wrote to warn the Church at Thessalonica about these times. He wrote almost 2000 years ago. He identified the coming of “the lawless one” as a sign. From Scripture we know that this “lawless one” will exalt himself over the visible Christian church, and yet teach doctrine inimical to the doctrine of the Apostles, an anti-Christian doctrine.

Identified by the signs of teaching false doctrine, forbidding marriage and forbidding certain kinds of food, the Pope of Rome has certainly fulfilled the prophecy. But he is not alone. St. John uses the word “antichrists” – in the plural – and says that in his time many had already come. The “lawless one” comes according to the working of satan. He comes with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception.

These signs are all around us. Our public schools ridicule the Christian faith and prevent its practice. Christian businessmen are sued and attacked for living according to the Word of God, with our government supporting the assaults.

The only true faith is pushed out of the public square, with man-made imaginations and even perversion taking center stage. Life, a gift of God, has no value. Hatred is unbridled in our nation and world, with the murder of those who don't agree with a certain ideology now more common.

And, as St. Paul prophesies, the masses are persuaded. They believe the lies. Secular media, public schools and universities are the modern Mars Hill, the contemporary Areopagus where the people spend their time telling and hearing anything new. Perversion is counted as normal, lust has supplanted love. Fundamental truths are rejected in the madness of the age, and aberrations refuted even by natural law are accommodated.

But St. Paul could have said the same about Corinth or Thessalonica or Rome in his day. For the dark forces that drive licentiousness and debauchery are only a few days younger than the creation. It is an ancient deception, a lie bought by every generation of fallen man. So the Apostle teaches that it is accepted and believed “among all those who perish.”

As in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, so also in 2nd Thessalonians Paul teaches that there is a point at which God draws a line, and gives the sinner over to his sin. Upon those who reject His Word and believe the demented doctrines of sinners God sends strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who have pleasure in unrighteousness.

But from the time God gives them over to their sin, until the time of their condemnation, fallen men work to convince others of their lies. And your flesh has desired to hear their doctrine. Your old Adam has risen to their tempting siren's song. For

you are no less fallen than they. Your sins are no less transgressions of God's Holy Law. You have been no less a man of lawlessness.

So for you the Words of St. Paul hold great comfort in the face of a perishing world. He brings you this comfort from the doctrine of predestination. Those who perish did not receive the love of the truth. But in His great mercy, in His boundless love for you, God chose you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification.

He chose you personally and individually. But His choosing of you does not work your salvation. St. Paul teaches that your salvation comes by the Spirit, and belief in the Truth.

So that you be spared the condemnation your sins have deserved, so that you be saved out of the masses that perish, God brings you to a knowledge of the Truth that saves. And that Truth, the Truth in which you believe over against the teachings of the world, is that Jesus Christ shed His Blood to pay for your sins. He died to win you, to buy you back, to pay your price, to sunder you from death into the everlasting life He took up in His miraculous resurrection.

Hearing that Gospel Word, that Truth, by the working of the Spirit of God, the forgiveness that Christ won for you is applied to you. He calls you by the Gospel, that you obtain not condemnation, but the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And the faith that receives Christ trusts in God's Word, which creates and informs faith. God's holy Law is written in your heart and in your mind, and your sins are forgiven. You believe that you are baptized into Christ, and that rebirth by

Water and Word is for you a regeneration, a renewal, wherein your transgressions are removed, and God the Spirit fills you.

You hear the Words of Christ, His invitation to you to "Take and eat", "Take and drink", and you believe that He gives you His Body with the Bread, and His Blood with the wine. You eat and drink, and God works the sanctification of salvation by the Spirit and belief in the Truth.

You have the Word of God. Faith trusts in that Word, rejecting all teachings contrary to it. And the Truth of God's Word reveals the lawlessness of the world, that you discern the spirits, that you rightly judge, that you remain in the Truth.

Soon the Lord will consume the "lawless one" with the breath of His mouth. All darkness will be destroyed by the brightness of His coming. But for you, dear Christian, for you, Redeemed of Christ, for you, child of the Light, that Day will be one of rejoicing, a Day when what you now hold true by faith is proved to be true. On that Day the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, which you have now by promise, will be yours for eternity.

Until that day God has given you faith. And in the Holy Meal with which He banquets you today, there is strengthening for your faith, forgiveness of your sins, and the comfort and consolation of the Holy Gospel of the Lord who died and rose for you. For He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, and you live to Him.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.