

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10**PREFACE**

Not only is deceit evil, but evil is deceitful. What if it were not; what if, for example, someone running for the U.S. presidency actually told the truth about his or her intentions for the country?

- I will institute a sweeping restructuring of what you have now; your costs will go up as your choices are reduced—or even disappear.
- This will be part of my plan to convert this democratic republic into a socialist state.
- And, by the way, I hate coal miners and oil companies, I hate gun owners, and I hate Christians.

For evil to win in a reasonably civilized society, it must lie, it must deceive. What if the serpent had told the truth in the Garden of Eden? Would Adam and Eve have taken the fruit if he had?

- Yes, you will indeed know both good and evil—but you will become and want to *do* evil.
- By disobeying God you will corrupt not just yourselves, but billions upon billions of people that come after you; from now on every person born on this earth will be born in sin, and alienated from God.
- And oh, by the way, even the earth itself will be corrupted by your disobedience.

To be fair, people who are not evil—evil in a societal, worldly sense—can also deceive. But the righteous don't *have* to lie to convince, whereas evil is, by its nature, deceitful. Our text in 2 Thessalonians speaks of this deceit.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

Before we examine v9, I want to look at something in v10. You may be wondering where I get this business of evil being inherently deceitful. Our text holds a clue to this, but some of the translations are not helpful. For example, the NIV says,

and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.

The way that is expressed, it could easily mean that there are “sorts of evil” that do *not* deceive. But what the Greek literally says is, “every deceit of unrighteousness”—which is how the NASB puts it:

and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish,

The NKJV (“with all unrighteous deception”) and the ESV (“with all wicked deception”) leave open the possibility that there is deception that is *not* evil. What Paul is saying is that deception is the first and paramount tool of Satan and his servant, because not only is it necessary to accomplish their goal, but it flows out of the *inherent nature* of evil.

As usual, Jesus said it best.

Read John 8:43-45.

I have said before: Without suggesting equivalency, what Christ is to God the Father, Antichrist is to Satan; it is a dark, perverse, mirror image of the original. And, as Paul puts it in v9, just as Christ Jesus will have a *parousia*, so too will the man of lawlessness have a *parousia*. That is the Greek word translated “coming” in v9. And this time instead of his coming in holiness and righteous power from God the Father, the Antichrist will come in accordance with the *energeia* (en-erg'-aye-ah)—the operative power—of *his* father, Satan.

in accord with the activity of Satan

Let's dwell for just a moment on what is meant by “in **accord** with the activity [or work] of Satan.” The word *kata* is one of those versatile prepositions that is translated all sorts of ways throughout Scripture. Here are just a few that give us an idea of what Paul might mean in this context:

after the manner of Satan (KJV)	from the standpoint of Satan
in agreement with the activity of Satan	within the work of Satan
conforming to the activity of Satan	with the effect of the work of Satan
with reference to the work of Satan	with the motives of Satan

with all power and signs and false wonders

Paul also emphasizes Satan's impersonation of Christ by the Antichrist by employing the same words used to describe the work of God through Christ Jesus and His disciples to attest to their authenticity.

Read Hebrews 2:2-4.

Jesus Himself confirmed that this would take place in the end times:

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24)

power = *dynamis* = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); **specially miraculous power (usually by implication a miracle itself)** :- ability, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

signs = *semeion* (say-may'-on) = neuter of a presumed derivative of the base of <G4591> (semaino); **an indication, especially ceremonial or supernatural** :- miracle, sign, **token**, wonder.

wonders = *teras* = an omen; a wonder or **marvel**.

The venerable W. E. Vine puts these three into perspective for us:

A sign is intended to appeal to the understanding, a wonder appeals to the imagination, a power indicates its source as supernatural.

Note: If you compare the various translations you will find that the modifier “false” floats around a bit. Wherever it belongs, we should not interpret this verse as meaning that these signs and wonders are somehow fake. I don’t mean to pick on the NIV, but the word “counterfeit” is not appropriate, nor should it modify all three.

Once again, as with “deception of wickedness” in v10, order is important. As Robert L. Thomas writes, “They will not be ‘counterfeit’ but *genuine supernatural feats to produce false impressions*, deluding people to the point of accepting the lie as truth.” (emphasis added)

Satan is not God, but he *is* supernatural, with powers beyond the abilities of man, and he will pour these powers into the man of lawlessness for his own dark purpose.

v10

Alongside “all power and signs and false wonders,” the man of lawlessness will be coming “with all the deception of wickedness.” Verse 10 begins the descent, during the Tribulation, of unbelievers into irretrievable perdition.

Just who are these people? To who does Paul refer here? Are they antagonistic to God to start with (i.e., unregenerate), or do they become that by means of God’s deluding influence (v11)?

and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish

NASB, KJVs: those who perish

NIV, ESV: those who are perishing

Personally I favor “perishing,” and I wouldn’t mind having an audience with the editors of the NASB to ask them why they chose “perish,” when, in 1 Corinthians 1: 18 and 2 Corinthians they chose “perishing” for the very same word (*apollumenois*). Not that they haven’t the right to; I’d just like to understand their reasoning.

Sidebar: For all those publishers of Bibles out there, I would like to propose a new type of publication: a Bible that includes running commentary by the scholarly editors. This way we could know *why* the editors chose to translate passages as they did.

We are all born in a state of perishing; we are all born upon the pathway to condemnation and death. And this passage in the Thessalonian letters refers to the same individuals as those in the Corinthian letters: the unregenerate; those who have rejected Christ.

because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

We can look at this from two directions:

- they did not receive because it was not offered
- they chose not to receive it when it was offered

First, if some are counted among the elect ([Romans 8:30](#); [John 6:44, 65](#)), this means that some are *not*. Part of being chosen by God is to be granted as a gift a love of *the* truth (note the definite article: not love of truth, but love of *the* truth). This is, admittedly, a peripheral interpretation, but I believe it is worthy of note—if for no other reason than to reinforce in our minds God’s manifest control over all this. Our relationship with God, with Christ Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, and with His written word—all is dependent on His grace, and if He does not grant that grace, we do not receive it. Jesus spoke of this to His disciples in the gospel of Matthew.

Read Matthew 13:10-13.

The more direct interpretation of the end of v10 is that these individuals *chose* not to receive, or accept, the truth. The Greek *dechomai* does indeed emphasize a more passive receiving (as opposed to taking, which more often uses the Greek *lambano*), but in both the Septuagint (OT) and NT *dechomai* is used as a technical term for the believing acceptance of God’s divine word (OT) and acceptance of the gospel (NT).

After Jesus’ description of Satan as the father of lies in John 8, He continues on in His discourse about the receiving of truth.

Read John 8:45-47.

Matthew Henry, writing in 1708 about the behavior of people far into the future, but written about in the first century by the apostle Paul in our text, could be describing the society of our own time.

Matthew Henry: The persons are described who are [\[the Antichrist’s\]](#) willing subjects, or most likely to become such. They are such as love not the truth that they may be saved. They heard the truth (it may be), but they did not love it; they could not bear sound doctrine, and therefore easily imbibed false doctrines; they had some notional knowledge of what was true, but they indulged some powerful prejudices, and so became a prey to seducers. Had they loved the truth, they would have persevered in it, and been preserved by it; but no wonder if they easily parted with what they never had any love to. And of these persons it is said that they perish or are lost; they are in a lost condition, and in danger to be lost for ever.

And Matthew Poole puts into perspective this passage with the next, which cues up our next session on vv11-12.

Matthew Poole: They were first deluded, which was their sin; and God sends them strong delusion, and that is their punishment.