![Walk with the Word — Commentary]

Take the End Times Apostasy Test

> *Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12)*

There seem to be some Christians who are afraid that they will accidentally, or by some kind of clever ruse, be tricked into receiving the mark of the beast. However, Scripture teaches us that spiritual deception does not work that way, but is the inevitable destination of someone who willfully and consciously chooses to live in opposition to God's Word and ways. In Paul's teaching about the coming of the Antichrist, we are provided with a list which confirms exactly that, showing precisely what it takes to be deceived by Satan in the character of the Antichrist: "*they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved*" is the foundation leaving them vulnerable to "*a deluding influence*" ultimately causing them to "*believe what is false*" because "*they did not believe the truth*". This is succinctly summarized as "*pleasure in wickedness*". By standing in the future and looking back from the point of view of the end result, Paul is also giving us a test for apostasy, a kind of roadmap by which we can gage the progress of apostasy at its earliest stages in the present time. These are not merely measurements which we strictly apply to others, but even more importantly that we use for ourselves.

Test #1: Have I believed the truth?
It is important to make the distinction that it is not **A** truth, but **THE** truth. How do we know for sure what, exactly, is **THE** truth?

> *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. (John 17:17)*

The priority is always on the Word of God, not a book which "seems" spiritual, nor a program that "feels" good, nor a well-intentioned speaker who "soothes" the ear. We live at a time when not only is most of Christendom embracing some kind of substitute for the Word of God as the guiding truth of their life, but when the very Word of God has been purposely mistranslated into a number of popular versions in order to undermine its working on those who actually do read it. The reason so many today, in reality, worship a false Jesus is because they have not come to know the true Jesus which can only be revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures.

It is important to note that a big problem also has to do with how many interpret the word "believe". In its everyday English usage "believe" is far more often equated with "suppose", "assume", "understand" or "give credence to"; it is mostly an expression pertaining the possession of knowledge about someone or something. But the biblical definition of "believe" is "to put into practice". More pointedly, a person is proven to believe in Christ by living His Word to such a degree that they consistently live a visibly, changed life that no longer embraces the world.

> *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:23-25)*

Who is susceptible to apostasy? Someone who is not proving what they claim to believe by living a life putting God's Word into practice. "Knowing" is never a substitute for "believing"—being what James calls "*an effectual doer*".

Test #2: Have I taken "pleasure in wickedness"?
This is not speaking of temporarily backsliding and engaging in a biblically unrighteous activity, but becoming so engaged as to experience actual "pleasure". This is speaking of allowing a sinful behavior to become so entrenched side-by-side with one's claims of Christianity that it results in a lifestyle.

> *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater*

> *riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26)*

Every false teaching in every form within the Church today has at its bottom line objective the goal to get us to trust in *this* life to the exclusion of the *next*. Some are more subtle than others, they may have different proponents and different window dressing, but one of the proofs of a biblical "faith"—a life putting God's Word into daily practice, is living for the next life instead of this present one. Paul takes it even further…

> *and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:32)*

Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians that those "*who did not believe the truth…took pleasure in wickedness*" explains for us the difference between an authentic believer and the counterfeit. While a true believer can succumb to their faults, their behavior can lead to a break in communion with Christ and they may sin in the most serious and grievous ways, they will **never** take "pleasure" in it! No, they will hate what has happened to them and spiritually wrestle with it until they come to mourn bitterly and sincerely repent in the course of seeking reconciliation.

Who is on the road to apostasy? Those who allow sin to so reside in parallel to their so-called Christianity that they do not just merely become comfortable with it, they take *pleasure* in it. We see evidence of this today in the fact that every poll and study has found that there is no longer any statistical difference when it comes to any moral issue between those who go to church and those who do not. (Note that I said "go to church", not "born-again" or regenerate believers.) Whether it is adultery, homosexuality, abortion, or any moral issue which God's Word specifically identifies as sin and unrighteousness, there are unspeakable numbers of church-goers who "*not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them*". They have "*taken pleasure in wickedness*".

Test #3: Have I received the love of the truth?

Although it starts with **THE** truth and not just **A** truth, it narrows the definition of "truth" to a much finer point by stipulating this is **THE** truth necessary "*to be saved*". Those who are in danger spiritually can trace the very beginning, root cause to leaving **THE** truth and gradually allowing it to be replaced by something else. It is either a case of having at

one time embraced God's Word only to willfully leave it, or having never clung to it to begin with.

Perhaps an even more important qualifier in this verse is "*the love of*". "Love" means much more than feeling intense affection or fondness for something, but to be completely devoted and singularly fixed on someone or something. In our present climate, I do not think "*the love of the truth*" is present in a pulpit which no longer teaches from Scripture, or someone who gives priority to other books such as *Purpose Driven* or *The Shack*, or does not first view all things through the prism of Scripture. Can someone really claim they have "*the love of the truth*" if they are not regularly devoted to Scripture, do not really know Scripture, rarely form their basis for church and fellowship around Scripture, and basically do not live their life according to God's Word?

But there might be an even more important descriptor provided in the qualifier, "*They did not **receive***". This is an argument that has been hotly debated for most of my lifetime, which asks the question that if people calling themselves "Christian" do not live like Scripture says a Christian should, if they embrace practices and books which replace the authentic with a counterfeit, if they are professing **A** truth instead of **THE** truth, what exactly have they "received"? Scripture is clear that the proof of salvation is in a life that is forever changed and living a daily, crucified life in stark contrast to the old life. There seem to be an overwhelmingly large number of people who go to church but whose lives are not discernibly different from those who do not. "Voting" for Jesus is not the same thing as "living" for Jesus. A truly born-again Christian is not only changed in heart but mind because they have a love for the truth which is evident by their visibly changed life and behavior.

This is not just a test to be applied to everyone else, but most importantly it is a self-test. "Love" of the truth is a far different animal than "knowledge" of the truth; it is possible to know what the truth is and yet not be so personally drawn to it that we actually put it into practice. One of the characteristics of the best Christian role models is a love of God's Word expressed in how it has not merely changed them from their past life, but continues to transform them in their new life in Christ. A true love relationship sees an exclusive devotion as continually providing positive benefits; It is never expressed as a "chore" or "burden" or "restriction", but becomes a testimony of its qualities of freedom.

But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:25)

Those on the path of apostasy are not just at odds with the truth, they lack "*the love of the truth*" to the point that they take "*pleasure in wickedness*". In them we can see how spiritual deception really works, that it is the end result of the personal choice to exchange the truth for a lie.

For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, (2 Thessalonians 2:11)

There is no shortage of truth-tellers. When it comes to documenting and sounding the trumpet of alarm where false teachers, false movements and sinful living is concerned, I cannot begin to count the number of speakers, books, websites and even entire ministries exclusively devoted to exposing the biblically false. The problem is not that we do not have enough people and resources providing and expounding the truth, the real problem is the great resistance to *hearing* the truth. Remember, "*So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Rom . 10:17) implies that the opposite can be at work at well, that there is a vacuum of faith when there is a refusal to listen to the Word of Christ which is the only hope a true, saving change can take place. Such refusal is actually loving something other than the truth so as to eventually take pleasure in the very things which will destroy them.

At one time I wondered why there could possibly be such a lifestyle of sin within the walls of the church when, for the past thirty-five years, there has been no shortage of books, speakers, conferences and websites clearly sounding the truth. It is really not a mystery once we realize that to "listen"—which biblically means to have to live by the standard of God's Word—means giving up greater pleasure in this world. The real work of discernment in these Last Days is not just reaching each individual for the purpose of sincere repentance of sin and a return to God's Word, but ensuring we ourselves do not allow those root influences to take hold in our own life. No wonder Christ asked, "*However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*" (Lk. 18:8b)

I find it no small coincidence that this is precisely how the whole of Christ's Sermon on the Mount in summarized…

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:24-27)

Before they are going to be capable of properly understanding the truth of God's Word which we want to teach about how these are the Last Days in the shadow of all the prophetic fulfillment of Scripture devoted to the return of our Savior, we need to first reach them with the more important lesson of putting God's Word into practice on a personal, daily basis. Even those who "believe" we are in the Last Days are not properly prepared for them if they do not "believe" God's Word to the degree that they can prove it by loving His Word and taking no pleasure in what this world has to offer. The path is not through knowledge alone, but faithfulness that puts that knowledge into practice.

In Him,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org