Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Apparently, the sport that produces the most liars is **golf**. Because you fill in your own scorecard, many golfers give in to the temptation to put down a three where there should really be a four or a seven … And according to a certain Will Rogers, the only thing that produces more liars than golf is **income tax returns**. In the United States, for example, for every 5c that the tax department spends on checking tax returns it collects $100 in undeclared taxes. And sadly, one of the most abused areas of the whole tax return system is the church donations rebate section!

Well, lying and the importance of the truth is at the heart of the 9th Commandment. As we have seen in the Lord’s Day we just read, God has a great *dislike* for the many ways that we lie and deceive, and a great *love* for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So, most simply, we might say that lying (in all of its forms) is forbidden and truth (in all of its forms) is commanded.

But rather than consider a Bible passage that explicitly forbids lying or requires truth-telling, our approach today will be a little different. What we are going to do is to think about this commandment in the light of a passage of the Bible that lies right at the core of debates about the End-times. And while there are all sorts of debates about who the ‘the man of lawlessness’ is and whether he has come or will still come. **our focus today will be on the particular error associated with the end-times**. For we will see that the error if a 9th commandment error. But as we do this, we will consider the end-times in broad brush strokes.

So, in terms of the historical context, Paul had visited Thessalonica just for a few weeks. We read about that visit in **Acts 17**. But it was enough time for a church to be planted. And sometime later, Paul wrote two letters to this congregation, which we have in the New Testament. And in the first letter, he made some general comments about the Day of the Lord, meaning the Second Coming of Jesus. But as we come to 2 Thessalonians, false teaching in relation to the return of Christ meant Paul had address the topic again.

And so, in this chapter, Paul provides more detail about the end-times Calendar. And in this detail, we see that **there is something particularly devilish about 9th Commandment sin**. So, we will begin with verses 1-8 and Paul’s end-times **explanation**, then we will look at verses 9-12, which is where we see that lying and deception are identified as *the* end-times **error**, and we will finish with verses 13-17 and the end-times **encouragement**.

1. So, let’s begin with verses 1-8 and Paul’s **end-times explanation**.
   1. Back in **1 Thessalonians 5:1**, Paul said that the Thessalonians had no need to have anything written to them about the times and the seasons surrounding the Day of the Lord. But if you look at **verse 2** of our text, because some were going about teaching that the day of the Lord had already come, it was clear to Paul that the Thessalonians *did* need teaching about the times and seasons surrounding the day of the Lord. And so, with **verse 3**, the right teaching about the end-times begins with “*Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction*.” So, what is plain from these words is that before Jesus returns there will be a rebellion and the man of lawlessness will be revealed.
      1. The Greek word translated as **rebellion** is *apostasia*. It is the root of the English word apostasy. The Bible uses the word to speak of those who are part of the visible church but they reject the gospel and embrace false teaching.
         1. This is spoken about several times in the prophecy of Daniel. Again and again, there are references to those who will fall away from the faith they profess.
         2. Jesus spoke of this too in **Matthew 24:10-12**. He said, “*At that time many will turn away from the faith*.”
         3. **1 Timothy 4:1** says, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*.”
         4. So, in the time that leads up to the return of Christ, those who claim to be believers will be severely tested and tried in their allegiance to Christ and the truth of God’s Word. Some will have their unbelief exposed and will walk away.
         5. And when Paul wrote these words to the Thessalonians, this “rebellion” or great apostasy had not yet happened.
      2. And this rebellion is tied to the appearing of the “***man of lawlessness***.” And this could be a sermon study all by itself, but I am simply going to read out a note from one of my study Bibles that I have changed and added to a bit. The note says,

*It seems best to understand “the man of lawlessness” as applying to an individual man who embodies wickedness chiefly in the sphere of religion. He will lead many in the visible church into apostasy. But note what verse 10 says, they already “refused to love the truth and be saved.” So, none of these are the elect of God – true believers; they are unbelieving hypocrites. And this man of lawlessness will ultimately commit the most foul sacrilege of putting himself before humanity as its object of worship (Verse 4 says he will “take his seat in the temple of God.”). And we see in verse 9 that he will come by the power of Satan, as opposed to Christ, who came by the power of God; he will work “false signs and miracles,” in contrast to Christ, who worked true ones. So, he will present himself as Christ but in fact be a fraud, an imposter – the antithesis or opposite of Christ. And although Paul did not himself use the term, "antichrist," that is the term used in 1 John and it is a fitting synonym. But notice also what verse 8 says, “The Lord Jesus will kill [him] with the breath of His mouth and bring [Him] to nothing by the appearance of His coming.” So, the fate of this imposter is sealed; he will be destroyed at the coming of Christ.*

* + 1. Now, what is clear from **verse 6** is that when Paul wrote these words, the “*man of lawlessness*” was restrained and not yet revealed. So, you get the sense that Paul thought that the restrainer could be removed any day, and that then the man of lawlessness would appear, and he had had conversations with the Thessalonians about this. And the Thessalonians knew from Paul “*what*” was restraining him. But **verse 7** speaks of the restrainer as a “*he,*” and that a time will come when “*he*” is out of the way and the man of lawlessness can come and wreak his havoc.
       1. But of course, we are not privy to those conversations. All we have is what is written here and the other relevant Scriptures. And here we are, 2000 years later, and the ‘man of lawlessness’ is still restrained.
       2. So, while there may be some specific human agency or institution in view here, using the ‘interpret Scripture with Scripture principle,’ let’s listen to **Revelation 20**: It says there, “*And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time*.”
       3. So, while we are free to debate the involvement of a particular human agency, ultimately it is the angel of God, or, even more ultimately, our sovereign God Himself who restrains the “man of lawlessness.”
       4. So, it will only be when the gospel has been heard by all God’s elect that the angel releases the devil that the man of lawlessness will appear and do his work for a short time.
  1. And believers who are alive then will recognize all of this, which is why they will expect the return of Jesus.
     1. Turn back to **1 Thessalonians 5:1**: “*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.*” Do you see Paul’s main point? The Day of the Lord will surprise unbelievers, who are in darkness, but it will not surprise believers, who are in the light; they will expect His return.
     2. Jesus said the same thing in **Matthew 24**. He said, There will be wars and “*famines and earthquakes in various places … there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be … Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken … So also, when you see all these things, you know that He is near, at the very gates*.”
     3. So, believers who are alive when the Lord Jesus returns will not be surprised; they will expect His return because of what they see happening around them!

* 1. Now brothers and sisters, this all sounds quite terrifying, doesn’t it. Rebellion, apostasy, tribulation, a man of lawlessness … It sounds plain awful! And it is! But Paul did not write these words to terrify believers but to encourage them! And we will say more about this in our third point, but we need not fear this “man of lawlessness” and the great falling away! With the Scriptures in hand and the Spirit of Christ within us, and as we stand together with our brothers and sisters in the church, and the elders that the Lord has given us, we have all that we need to recognize false teaching and resist it!

1. So, that is Paul’s end-times **explanation**. But what is especially relevant for our consideration this afternoon is **verses 9-12**, which is where Paul speaks about the end-times **error**.
   1. If you look first at **verse 7**, Paul says, “*For* *the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*.” The NIV has it as “*the secret power of lawlessness is already at work*.” One commentator says,

*The result of the restraining influence [that we have just spoken about] … is that for the moment, lawlessness operates as a secret power. While not totally hidden, it nevertheless cannot flourish openly. It bubbles beneath the surface awaiting its time to erupt and envelop the earth in evil.*

And if you are a student of history at all, you will know what this is about. There has always been sin. We feel its effects on us and we see its harmful effects as we give in to temptation. We see it where there is persecution. We see it where ungodly ideas and philosophies arise and take hold. We see it where there are governments and regimes opposed to God and His word. We see it in how quickly so many countries have legalized abortion and euthanasia and same-sex marriage, and how transgenderism is sweeping the world as something perfectly normal and to be celebrated.

But so many examples of wickedness have flourished for a period of history and then disappeared when revival or reformation happens. And when one country has turned its back on the Lord, the church in another country has flourished and grown through missionary work.

But what our text reveals is that a time is coming when the restraining chain of the Angel of God will be loosed and sin and lawlessness will burst forth on the earth. And it will seem like nothing can stop it.

* 1. And notice how **verses 9-12** describes that time: It is with “*false* *signs and wonders*.” The NIV has it as “*counterfeit miracles*.”
     1. With the Old Testament prophets, and with the Lord Jesus and the Apostles, miracles and signs were *genuine* and performed to demonstrate the authenticity of the one who performed the miracles and to encourage true faith.
     2. But with the man of lawlessness, his ‘miracles’ are a “*wicked deception*,” as we see in **verse 10**. So, they will appear spectacular, and they will convince many in the church that He must be the Christ who has come.
     3. But the key point here is that the false signs of the man of lawlessness will not convince the genuine believer who loves the truth, meaning that he or she who knows the Bible. He or she will see those signs for what they are – false! They will know that this man is not the Christ!
  2. But as we think about this time in general, we see that it is chiefly characterized by **9th Commandment** **errors** – what is false, deceit, those who refuse to believe the truth, delusion, deception.
     1. And this should not surprise us because the devil, at the core of his being, is a liar. In **John 8**, Jesus was speaking with the Jews. He called on them to believe in Him, but they refused to. And Jesus said to them, “*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. 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*.”
     2. And so, it follows that the short time where the devil is set free to wreak havoc on earth through the man of lawlessness will be characterized by 9th Commandment errors.
  3. But the Lord Jesus, by way of total contrast, is spoken of in Scripture as “*the way, the truth, and the life*.” Jesus is the truth. God’s word is the truth. And our only defense against the lies and deceptions of the end-times, and of each day that we live, is faith in Christ and being saturated with the truth of God’s Word.
     1. You know how quickly truth changes in the world. I am sure you have often heard it said that truth is relative. Today this is true, tomorrow it is not. Wrong! **Hebrews 13:8** says, “*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever*.” **Isaiah 40:8** says, “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever*.”
     2. So, if you have **not yet believed** in the truth of Jesus, I beg of you to do so now, today. In Jesus Christ, you have truth and a rock solid foundation for life!
     3. And if your commitment to Jesus is ‘head only’ or half-hearted, then heed the warning of 2 Thessalonians 2. Do not treat Jesus like a fire-truck who is just useful in emergencies. Give yourself to Him, fully, so that you may not be among those who fall away and reveal themselves to have never been one with Him. Read His word, listen to sermons, participate in Bible study, so that you will be armed to recognize all that is false.
     4. And I hope you have also seen **how serious sins against the 9th Commandment are**. So let us be those who love the truth, in all its forms, and who hate the lie, in all its forms. So, tell the truth on your golf scorecard. Do not cheat on your tests or your income tax returns. Be very careful how you speak about someone else, taking great care to avoid gossip or slander, and gently confront the person who shares gossip with you. And do all that you can to advance and protect your neighbour’s reputation.

1. So, the end-times **error** will be characterized by 9th Commandment violations. But thirdly, finally, and very briefly, Paul finishes this chapter with an **end-times** **encouragement** in verses 13-17.
   1. There were many things about the Thessalonian believers that Paul was thankful for. The phrase “*firstfruits to be saved*” is because they were among the first of the Gentile nations to be saved. And we also see some wonderful links to the passage in 1 Peter that we looked at this morning. For Paul speaks about God *choosing them* and that their being saved was “*through sanctification of the Spirit*.” But he also adds, “*and belief in the truth*.”
      1. This book, congregation, is not a book like any other or just one version of the Scriptures among many. This is the truth! This is the revelation of God about creation and the fall and salvation in Christ and about how to live and about a coming Judgment Day.
      2. So, to the Thessalonians, Paul said in **verse 15**, “*So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter*.” And for you and me, this means stand firm and hold fast to everything taught in the Bible! It is both a ‘lie detector’ and a truth preserver! And it does so because it reveals Jesus Christ who is the truth. And those who know Him as the truth and saturate themselves in His Word, by His Spirit, will not fall for the lies of the man of lawlessness.
      3. And finally, on top of that, in Christ, our salvation is secure! **Verse 14** says, “*To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*.” The promise of the Lord Jesus to all of God’s chosen ones is that He will *lose none of all that [the Father] has given [Him], but raise them up at the last day.”*  So if we should see the short time when the man of lawlessness is at work, God will preserve us in faith and bring us to Himself in glory. Amen!

Let us pray: