

## Future-Present Faith

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### The Future Matters

What we believe about the future forms our present. If you were to receive news you have cancer, what you believed about your future would have a profound affect on the present. Say you don't think you're going to make it, won't survive. You resign yourself to despair, give up, slip into depression. But if you believe you're gonna beat it, you'll study treatment plans, improve your diet, experience an overall hopefulness. *What we believe about the future forms our present.* If true about cancer or weather, how much more is it true about the future of history, about of Christ? Creator and sustainer of all things? It should have a profound affect on the way we live. The Thessalonians believed Jesus had *already* come. *They struggled to believe Jesus had not returned. Today, we struggle to believe that he will return. They over-anticipated the return of Christ; we under-anticipate his return.* Either belief has massive consequences. One produces paralyzing fear; the other dangerous deceit. *What we believe about the future matters.* Look at verses 1-2: “we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed.” The word shaken means to be agitated or cast down. Their response to news from outside and inside the church, from people claiming they have a word from the Spirit and letters written to the church, headlines

you might say, was *hasty*. They made *snap judgments* based on emotion: on edge, in despair. Don't let your *emotions to get the best of you*. NT Wright translates, "don't be blown of course in your thinking." To avoid snap judgments, being tossed to and fro by news, we have to gather our thoughts. Social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has observed a dangerous trend on college campuses. Speakers are invited to campus, and students picket the speaker, try to run them off because they find their ideas "harmful." The university is an establishment for the free exchange of ideas, regardless of how you feel about an idea. And a mark of maturity, of liberal education, is the ability to engage with ideas we don't understand or disagree with. But students picket not because they disagree with the ideas but because they find them harmful. This, he says, is creating a culture of fragility. *The concern is that emotional reasoning is replacing rational reasoning.* Emotional reasoning is becoming the arbiter of what is true. If a person feels like they are a different gender, they should be free to alter the cold, hard biological facts. If you feel something is true, even if it isn't it should be respected as true. Now, we should sympathize with a person's feelings *but this does not mean we should abandon the facts.* In the words of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "[Everyone is entitled to his own opinions, but not to his own facts.](#)" The truth should be prized over our pathos. When it isn't, we make snap judgments become fearful, anxious, disagreeable. We're quickly

shaken in mind, and can end up reducing a person, or group, to a single issue. In our first few years of marriage, I wanted to talk to about our marriage. We'd sit down and I'd share a few things. Then my wife would stare at me blankly. She didn't open up to talk about her feelings, so I did what any reasonable person would do—I got angry and accused her of holding out. That helped. I began to see her thru a single emotional lens, someone who didn't want to be intimate with me, who was holding out on me. It wasn't true. She had been raised differently, had a different way of communicating, and some fears about opening up. So the more I saw her my narrow, emotional lens, the less was able to appreciate her other qualities. My emotional reasoning distorted the truth of who she was. Deep down, I believed something about the future—we would never have an emotionally satisfying marriage, so I responded in anger. What we believe about the future forms the present. David Powlison, father of gospel-centered counseling movement was diagnosed with cancer, a Stage 1 tumor on the pancreas. But the doctor told him the bad news has a sliver lining. We caught it early; it's operable. David wrote a email saying nothing could be sure, and that he was spending time in Ps 112, [The righteous are not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady; he will not be afraid.](#) His future up in the air, he chose not to trust in a silver lining; but in the Lord. This week he was rolled into surgery and

when he woke up he was told he has Stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He admitted it was hard news, but is still choosing to trust the Lord over prognosis. What we believe about the future shapes the present. What believe about bad news bends us in a direction. What news do you need to entrust to the Lord? The future of your kids, the news about work, the outcome of the election? Will you put faith in temporary relief or eternal promises? Will your heart be steady? It can be, even while feeling like an emotional mess. What we believe about Jesus return, should make us steady, firm, hopeful. Christians, of all people, should be the most charitable towards those we disagree with. We should put the truth of what we share in Christ above where we differ over in politics. Only Christ sees all things, especially the heart, so we resist the temptation to reduce others to a single category or perspective. We should be incredibly charitable because Christ has been infinitely charitable with us.

### **Don't be Deceived**

With all that, you may feel the weight of what Paul says next, **Let no one deceive you in any way (3)**. Thessalonians were being deceived that Christ had already returned. He responds to their concern day of the Lord won't arrive until two things happen: **a rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed**. Not sequential: First comes rebellion, second the man of lawlessness. But both these

things have to happen first before Jesus returns. This is important because a lot of Christians get consumed with reading the tea leaves of the future, going to prophecy conferences, and trying to crack the end-times. I did. But that's not the point. He tells us future things, not so we can predict but so we can prepare. The word translated rebellion is literally, apostacy. An apostate abandons their beliefs. He's saying there will be widespread abandonment of Christ in the last days. Jesus says it like this, **For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.** (Mt 24:24). The deception will be so strong that people who looked like they were chosen by God will fall away. How? The man of lawlessness. This will be a person of godlike proportions. His moniker, lawlessness, means anti-law, meaning he contradicts the law of the Lord, the Scriptures. He sets up an alternate authority. His rhetoric, his views, his laws will compete with God's laws. Who is he? We're told in 1 John there will many anti-Christ, Roman Emperors who deified themselves, various religious leaders, but this is the final one. He'll take a seat in the temple of God. What could he be referring to? Of the ten times temple is used in the NT, nine are figurative. Do you know what they refer to? The Church. The Man of Lawlessness will have considerable influence over the worldwide church. Many will fall away. In fact, his teaching is already at work, **"For the mystery of lawlessness is**

[already at work](#) (7). His identity is not revealed, but his mysterious deceit is in play. One aspect of this teaching may be the replacement of truth with feeling. C.S. Lewis reportedly said of devils, They shouldn't waste time on getting Christians to *believe* Christianity isn't true, just make them *feel* as though it isn't true. *If we feel something strongly, we will rewrite reality, like I did with my wife. Like a patient does with cancer. Like some will do with Christ.* When we replace what's true with what we feel, we fall into deceit. Here's a practical way it shows up. Lawlessness shows up in thinking we can have personal sins no one knows about. Private sins. We draw a line between Us and God, effectively saying you have no jurisdiction. This leaves us vulnerable, exposed, and under threat. Why? Because we're deceived. The Lord Christ has all jurisdiction, sees every corner of every heart. *Paul says don't let anyone deceive you in any way!* Gather your thoughts, your beliefs, and set them on Christ.

## **Love the Truth**

You can probably see, quite naturally, the need to love the truth. It's what the perishing refuse to do: [Love the truth](#) (10). *But to love the truth we have to know the truth.* Which is why Paul says, [Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?](#) (5). He is writing to remind them of things *they already know*. So, its not enough to have read the Bible. The challenge is to believe the Bible.

Our flaw isn't a lack of information; it's a lack of affection. And that is very hard in an information Age, where we privilege knowing over loving. But it's precisely what's needed to escape deceit. **Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day** (Ps 119:97). The only antidote to deception, is the Law of the Lord. The only rope strong enough to pull us out of the hole of deceit the words of Christ. But we have to have the rope handy. If you haven't read or meditated on God's word, by yourself, in a month, two months you're in danger. If you're hiding private sins, and drawing a line between you and God, you're in danger. The reason is you're privileging a false authority, bowing down to the law of Self, to "my truth." We should love the Truth, memorize it, take with us, dwell on it day an night, so we aren't duped. And the Truth is *Jesus wins*. How? He slays the lawless one with "**the breath of his mouth.**" What does that mean? It's a reference to the Word of God. It's how Jesus defeats Deceit. He judges and exposes it. And it's also how he saves his people, "**to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**" 13. What we believe about the future, about Jesus return, matters immensely. He's coming back to save those who are sanctified by the Spirit and have belief in the truth. May he find us loving the truth, trusting his promises, adoring his Person.