

It is unfortunate... but as the days get darker... Christians seem to start looking around for the Antichrist. ... Any particularly polarizing person... who steps onto the world stage... brings upon himself accusations that he just may be the Antichrist.

When John F. Kennedy embarked on his presidential campaign in 1960... some people decided he was a good candidate for the Antichrist... because he had been wounded in the war (drawing on imagery from Revelation 13:3... that the Antichrist would survive a fatal wound.) ... I can remember in the 1970's when many thought Henry Kissinger might be the Antichrist. ... Others have pointed to various popes. ... Truth be told... just about anyone can be a prime candidate to be the Antichrist. – All you need is a fanciful method for determining it.

Several have used a method called *gematria*. Under this method... certain numbers are associated with letters in the alphabet. For example... you can “prove” that Adolf Hitler was the Antichrist... if you begin with 100 and assign each letter with a corresponding numerical value... (A = 100; B = 101; C = 102)... you come up with the following for “Hitler’s name”: H = 107; I = 108; T = 119; L = 111; E = 104; and R = 117. ... Now... add all of these numbers together... and you come up with a sum of (gasp!) **666** — the number of the Antichrist! ... So... there you have proof that Hitler is the Antichrist.

In truth... though... by using various numerical schemes... you can make practically anyone the Antichrist. ... But the bottom line is this: we don't know exactly who he is. We only know this—the Antichrist will rise upon the stage of world history and play the dominant role in end-time history... when God determines it is the season.

Because the days we live in have become so dark... I believe there is someone who is alive today and standing in the wings... who will be the devil incarnate. He will be Satan in human form. ... He is called “*the beast*” (in Revelation 13)... and he is called the “*antichrist*” (in 1 John 2:18.)

By the way... John is the ONLY Biblical writer who refers to him by that name. It is the most commonly used name for this person... but only John uses it in the Bible. In our passage today he is called the “*man of lawlessness – the son of destruction*” ... but please know that it is the same future world leader (who will be Satan incarnate.)

Today... we will examine Paul’s teaching regarding the rise of the Antichrist and the coming Tribulation on earth. ... The second chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians provides us with insight that we dare not be ignorant about... But neither should we place an unhealthy and foolish scrutiny on trying to figure out who he may be – before it is God’s plan for him to be released and revealed.

The reason for our study today... will be one of the reasons that Paul had when he wrote it - that we might be encouraged to grow an excited anticipation of meeting the REAL Christ! We are so close to the return of Christ. Amen...?

As the days get darker... the saints must get brighter... ... So let’s get started.

## **2 Thes 2:1-2**

Paul wrote in verse 2: “*Don’t be shaken in mind, or be troubled.*” ... Now... why were these people shaken? ... Why were they troubled?

Apparently... a bogus letter had gone out (a forged letter.) ... Somebody had signed Paul's name to it... and told these people they were already in the Great Tribulation (the Day of the Lord had come.)

Paul had written in his first letter that they were not destined for wrath. In the midst of telling them that their persecutors would suffer God's wrath... Paul wrote:

**1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

And earlier in Paul's first letter to them... (1 Thes. 1:10) he wrote that they were waiting for Jesus "*who delivers us from THE wrath to come.*"

But someone had forged a letter which agitated them into thinking that this was not true. They were not delivered from THE wrath to come. ...

Because of the trials that they were experiencing... these believers were led to believe they were in the 7 year Tribulation.

Paul wants them to stand firm... retain their composure... and not be shaken from their convictions concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus and their gathering together to Him. ... He wants them to avoid the wrong conclusion — from their deceptive informant — that "the day of the Lord has come."

When Paul mentions in verse 1 – "*the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together*" ... he is not thinking of two different events. These refer to the same thing – the rapture. (You see) the coming of the Lord Jesus is in two phases. He will come the first time... but not touch down on earth. He will gather all His saints in the air and take them back

with Him. ... Then He will come at the end of the tribulation with all the saints – and set up a 1,000 year reign here on earth.

Paul is writing to the “shaken-Thessalonians” to assure them that they had not missed Jesus’ first coming to gather His saints. They had not missed the rapture... and the persecution they presently suffered was not the tribulation. Paul goes on to comfort them by giving them solid proof.

He outlines a definite chronology of events... (things that need to happen... because they initiate and go along with this great day of God’s wrath)... and none of them had transpired yet. The first will be a distinctive DEFIANCE... (a wide-spread apostasy... a massive “falling away.”)

## 2 Thes 2:3-5

Please notice the phrasing in verse 3... “*that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first...*” **THE** rebellion... Do you see it? Paul used a definite article—**the** apostasia... (which is the Greek word translated as “rebellion.”) This suggests that he referred to an event (**the** apostasia)... of which they were already aware. Paul referred to a specific... distinguishable... apostasy (a falling away... or rebellion)... that will come in the future.

Apostasy occurs in every age... but this refers to the great apostasy predicted by Christ in Matthew 24:10–13.

### Matthew 24:10-13 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> *And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.* <sup>11</sup> *And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*

<sup>12</sup> *And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.* <sup>13</sup> *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

Our day gives scary evidence that this great apostasy is beginning. ... It is beginning just as Paul... (in his second letter to Timothy)... said it would.

### **2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.* <sup>2</sup> *For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

### **2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

We see this apostasy (described in 2 Timothy) in growing measure year by year - in the church today. But in our passage here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians... Paul presents all of this departure from true faith... as reaching a boiling point (a climax)... in the revelation of a person called “*the man of lawlessness – the son of destruction.*”

Boy! Wouldn't you agree that the world today is rushing to meet him? The world has always had rebellion against God (apostasy) since the beginning of time... but we seem to be on a dizzying and ever-accelerating descent toward this ultimate departure from truth... that will grow increasingly worse and then will climax with the person that Paul calls “the man of lawlessness.”

Now please stop and consider with me the spirit of lawlessness that we are seeing today... and how we got here. ... Lawlessness shouts very loud, “*My feelings are more real than any law outside of me.*” Today's spirit of

lawlessness disdains the concept of law. ... It disdains the idea of law. ... It calls for the abolition of police departments. City governments will not support their own police. Rioters can loot and riot without repercussion (not even an hour of jail time if they're caught.) ... If you try to protect your own property – you will be the one who is punished by the courts. ... Today's lawlessness says, "*Who's to say what right and wrong is? Only I can say what's right or wrong for me.*"

C.S. Lewis (90 years ago) wrote that for the first time in the history of the world... the Western intellectuals are saying... "*Every moral judgment is rooted not in eternal law, but in my feelings.*" He wrote that up until the 1930s and 1940s... every society and every culture everywhere in the world... always said... moral judgments to be true... must be rooted in eternal law. ... Lewis pointed out that what has now happened... is the intelligentsia of the West is now saying that moral judgments are always subjective.

When you say, "*I think sex outside of marriage is wrong,*" what you mean is, "*I feel it's wrong, and therefore, it's wrong for me.*" ... When you say, "*I think racist laws are wrong,*" what you really mean is, "*I feel they're wrong, and therefore, they're wrong for me.*"

Lewis' contention was that there had been an absolute system of values which abhorred murder... lying... theft... unkindness... disrespect for the elderly... selfishness... and greed. ... It was seen by all moral and religious centers in all cultures ... in all centuries... and this had been true from the very beginning of all literature until the mid-twentieth century.

But since the time of the 1940s forward... we have had a growing consensus that says, "*Who's to say what the law is?*"

Lewis was writing in the 1940s... and he observed that (at that time) it was only the intelligentsia who said this. But now it's 2021... and it's everywhere in common society. Lewis said people had discarded something in the last 90 years... that from the beginning of time... every century... every culture... every society... every religion has always believed... and that is -your feelings don't matter. ... There is an eternal law in which moral judgments are based... and you do not decide what is right or wrong for yourself!

This is amazing... because this lawlessness virtually didn't exist when Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians. But Paul says there has been a force released into the world that was at work when he wrote... and it's going to grow... and it's going to get bigger and bigger... and it's going to take on more and more powerful and visible and solid manifestations until it culminates in one man – the man of lawlessness.

That spirit (Paul said)... is at work in the world now. ... Back then... people would've said, "*That's ridiculous! Only idiots would say something like that.*" But no one would offer such disbelief like that now...!

One of the most stable forms of law that the world has ever seen... has been the United States Constitution. But it is really getting trampled on today. Its laws are no longer equally applied. ... Your right to freedom of speech no longer exists. It has given way to the current cancel culture that forces people into silence if it doesn't agree with society's fleeting

principles. ... “Separation of church and state” has fallen by the wayside as government must give churches permission to sing in church.

We seem to be on a dizzying and ever-accelerating descent to meet the ultimate climax... in the person that Paul calls “the man of lawlessness.”

But let me go back to the word “rebellion” in verse 3 (or “apostasia” in the Greek.) All that it means is “departure.” But departure from what?

Departure by who?

The context seems to be “departure from God’s truth.” But there is something else in the context that suggests that it is more than just this. I think that it means a well-known (clearly recognized) departure from God’s truth... which will happen ultimately ... but it will happen after a different kind of departure takes place – the rapture! ... (You see)... when all true believers are taken away with Jesus... the ultimate departure from God’s truth will happen. That will be THE apostasia that Paul wrote about.

Believers will depart... and then the man of lawlessness will be revealed and will force the people who are left behind to show the ultimate departure from God’s truth... by worshipping him. ... And Paul wanted us to understand that is what he meant... so he clarified it (for us) in verse 4.

## 2 Thes 2:4

*“My Dear Thessalonians... You have not missed the rapture because the ultimate lawlessness... rebellion... and departure from God’s truth has not yet occurred... when the man of lawlessness will take a seat in the Temple and establish a world religion centered on Him... No... No... No... My dear brothers and sisters. What you are experiencing is not the coming wrath of God. And I did not lie to you!”*

Now there is something that is holding back... (restraining)... this man of ultimate lawlessness - the Antichrist. The devil is on a leash!

## 2 Thes 2:6-8

There is something... someone... that is somehow keeping Antichrist from doing what he wants to do. ... There is a hindrance... there is a restraint. God has said to the devil, "*You can go so far, but no further.*" (LISTEN! This ought to encourage you...) God still has this world in His control. No matter what the devil does... and no matter how vile or evil he is... God is still in control. Never forget that. ***There is no*** panic ***in*** Heaven—***just*** plans.

So... what exactly is it... that restrains Satan's incarnate being from being revealed? If you have your Bible with you... you might want to circle the word "he" in verse 7. "*Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way...*" ... The restrainer... it would seem is a "he" (a person.) ... But hold on for just a minute. There is another word to circle. This one is found in verse 6. "*And you know what is restraining him now...*"

By circling the word "he" in verse 7... and the word "what" in verse 6... we can see that the restraining influence is both someone and something. ... But rather than confuse you all the more... let me just tell you that the "someone" is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the One Who restrains the Antichrist – until the time the Antichrist is to be revealed. The Holy Spirit is the only "someone" here on earth Who is capable. ... Now... where does the Holy Spirit abide...? ... He lives in us! He resides in the church of Jesus Christ! ... The something is Christ's church here on earth.

As long as the church is here on earth... until the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way... Satan and his incarnate being will be restrained. The church is here... restraining the power of Antichrist. (As weak as you might imagine the church to be today... because the Holy Spirit resides in us... the church is restraining what Satan wants to do.) At the rapture of the church... when the church is taken out... the Holy Spirit's influence through the church will be removed from this earth.

Jesus called us "*the salt of the earth.*" (Matthew 5:13) What does salt do? Well... my friend... salt cleanses. Salt purifies. Salt flavors. Salt penetrates. Salt preserves. ... When the salt is taken out... the corruption will begin.

Paul had already told the Thessalonians (in his first letter) that God has "*not appointed us to wrath.*" (That is what 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says.) ... As long as it is a day of grace... God will not pour out His judgments and His wrath upon this planet... just as the Flood would not come until **Noah** was safely in the ark. ... (And) fire would not fall from heaven until **Lot** was safely out of Sodom. Even so... judgment will not come until the church is removed from this planet.

Paul challenged the Thessalonians' distorted end-times belief that had shaken them... by first demonstrating that the *defiance* of the ultimate apostasy and the Antichrist has not yet come (2:3-4)... and... second... that the *delay* caused by the restraining force of the Spirit working through the church... is still holding back this ultimate wickedness (2:5-7). ... Next Paul describes what the ultimate wickedness will be like. ... But first he has to set it in the parameters of Christ's superior power. Christ's mere coming

and a simple breath from His mouth will destroy the Antichrist. As awful as he will be... he is no match at all for the True Christ.

## 2 Thes 2:8-12

These people will be judged and will suffer forever because they would not receive and believe the truth. ... In fact... their hearts will be so evil that they will not even have any love for the truth. ...

Warren Wiersbe writes:

*In these verses... Paul taught a sobering truth: a person can so resist the truth that he finally becomes deluded and has to believe a lie. There can be no neutral ground: either we believe the truth or we believe a lie. To reject the truth means to receive the lie.*

... [ P A U S E ] ...

This morning we have been dealing with a very sober subject... And I know that some people will walk away only thinking about the ever- increasing lawlessness around us today... which is rushing us toward it's ultimate expression in the man of lawlessness. ... But I don't think God would have us respond to this passage - like so many believers are prone to do.

Do you watch the news... wondering whether this or that current event might be a sign that the Tribulation has come upon us? ... Do you see lawlessness among the world leaders and wonder if one of them may be the Antichrist... poised to unleash his hellish fury on all humanity? ... Is your focus on judgment ... or ... salvation . . . wrath or rescue...? ... Are you basking in the light . . . or fretting in the darkness...?

Let me caution you. ... Those who have a fuzzy... imprecise understanding of the order of future events — like the Thessalonians did — end up being

Antichrist-focused ... .. But those who have a clear outline of the future — as presented by Paul in our passage today — are Christ-focused... NOT primarily looking at the world and its growing darkness... but (instead) looking up "to wait for His Son from heaven . . . who rescues us from the wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10).

The good news for believers in this discussion of the end times... is that God is in control! ... The Tribulation will occur because it is part of His plan. Those who experience it... will be those who refuse to believe the truth — those who take pleasure in unrighteousness instead of enjoying God.

So... while we might talk about the role of the Antichrist in God's plan... there is no need for us to search out obscure clues about his identity. As believers in Christ... we will not even encounter him. ... We will be gone when he steps onto the world stage. ... So... we are much better off "*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ*" (as Titus 2:13 says.) ... Our future is not wrapped up in the Antichrist... but in the Lord Jesus Christ. One day He will come for us... so we need to be always looking for Him. ... **{ P A U S E }** ...

Donald Grey Barnhouse tells the story of how one morning during the Christmas season he awoke and went to the piano in his home. He started to play "Silent Night" but then purposely stopped before playing the last note. He then walked into the hallway and listened to the sounds that came from the upstairs in his house. His eight-year-old son had stopped reading and was trying to find the final note on his harmonica. Another child was singing the note. Someone else came downstairs and asked, "Did you do that on purpose?"

For Christians... our whole song has been played—except for the last note. We know there has been no resolution to our song. So we wait... and long for... that last note to be struck.

But the question comes: Are you ready? The question comes: Are you saved? Because if you're not saved... and the Rapture comes... and we're gathered together to meet the Lord Jesus Christ... and you're left behind... the Bible says God will send you strong delusion... that you would believe a lie.

Why don't you trust the Lord today... that He took your punishment on the cross... (the punishment that you deserve... because you have sinned against God.) ... Believe that what He did is enough to satisfy the requirements of a Holy God... and dedicate your life to Him. ... Jesus' predicted return WILL happen... and I think it will be real soon! Be ready.