

## STUDY TWELVE – THE RAPTURE AND THE ANTICHRIST II

### INTRODUCTION

*“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.” (2 Thessalonians 2:7)*

Continued from Last Week:

#### The Antichrist

In 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul further described the Antichrist: *“... who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”*

The word "opposes" is translated from the Greek word which depicts an entrenched position against everything established. The tense paints the picture of a continual, unending, and perpetual resistance, and it reveals that rebellion is ingrained in this individual.

Even more, he is called the "Antichrist," which is a compound of the word anti and the word Christos. The word anti means against or in the place of, while the word Christos means Christ. This alerts us that this evil person will have a deeply rooted rebellion ingrained in his disposition that sets him against Christ and against everything that Christ represents — and in many respects, he will attempt to take the place of Christ in the eyes of society. This means people will see him as a Messiah-type individual who has come to serve the world and transform it into his new reality.

But Paul said the Antichrist is one who *"opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped."* We already saw the meaning of this word from the Greek, but this fierce opposition categorically tells us that the Antichrist will be brazenly against every previous godly way of thinking. He will attempt to lead a lawless world in an effort to "bulldoze" former dogmas and established codes of morality and move them out of the way. His goal will be to construct a new world order — one that is utterly free of God's influence.

This phrase *"who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped"* is important, for it tells us that the Antichrist will not only exalt himself above Christianity, but above *"all that is called God or worshipped."* This clearly means he will exalt himself higher than Jesus Christ, as well as higher than all other religious leaders and forms of religion that are known in the world. Even more, Paul wrote that the Antichrist will "show" himself as God. The word "show" is the Greek word which means to vividly portray, to point out, to illustrate, to show off, or to make a vivid presentation. In some way, the Antichrist will declare himself as God and will use all possible means to demonstrate his power to "show" himself as God — including lying signs and wonders.

#### WHO IS THE ONE THAT 'WITHHOLDS' OR RESTRAINS?

Then in Second Thessalonians 2:6, Paul said, *"And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time."* According to this verse, something has been holding back Satan from introducing the Antichrist to the world - so the question is, what, or who, is it?

In the Greek text, the sentence begins by saying, "And now...." The word "now" essentially means Paul said, "In this very moment, you should already know what withholding the Antichrist."

## UNDERSTANDING END TIMES

According to Paul, the only reason Satan had not already brought this end-time evil leader on to the world stage is because there was a restraining force that had hitherto stopped this diabolical move. This word "restraining" is a translation of the Greek word — it means to hold down or suppress something. It depicts a restraining force that is putting forth its energy to hold down evil and to suppress it from rising to a place of prominence.

Thus, Paul said there was and is some force —a restraining and withholding force — at work, and this force is the sole reason the Antichrist and his accompanying evil has not already been unleashed into the world. It is this restraining force that is holding back the manifestation of this satanic agenda.

### **That Man of Sin' Will Be Revealed at an Appointed Time**

The word "revealed" in verse 6, referring to the Antichrist, comes from the Greek word that pictures a veil that has been suddenly removed to expose what was behind the veil that had been concealed or hidden from view. Paul's use of this word means that a day is coming at the conclusion of the age when the restraining force that has been stalling, delaying, and postponing the floodgates of evil from being unleashed will be taken out of the way. When that removal occurs, this evil leader and the wickedness that accompanies him will make an entrance onto the world stage.

There is an appointed time when the Antichrist will make his appearance centre stage before the world. And, as you will see, this "time" will come when the restraining force that has been stalling, delaying, and postponing the advent of the Antichrist and all the evil that will accompany him has been removed.

In the moment the restrainer is removed, the curtains will be pulled back, and the Antichrist's identity will be made known to the world. The world will not necessarily perceive him as the Antichrist, but as a man suited for the age and in sync with a world that has tossed aside all moral restraints and the law of God. But the removal of the restrainer will trigger the moment when this evil person finally steps onto the word stage to obtain global attention.

### **A SECRET PLAN IS BEING EXECUTED RIGHT NOW**

In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, Paul tells us, *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."*

What is the "mystery of lawlessness?"

The word "lawlessness" comes from the Greek word *anomia*, which depicts a people or a world that is without law or lawless. It pictures people who possess no fixed moral standards living in a lawless world, free from the "outdated" voice of the Bible. The use of "lawlessness" (*anomia*) in the same phrase as "mystery" (*mysterion*) tells us that the current state of affairs in our time is the result of a secret plan set in motion long ago. Current society did not accidentally arrive at its present sad state of affairs. Its downward trend has been strategically orchestrated step by step, year by year, and century by century by a devious satanic plan designed to prepare the way for the Man of Lawlessness.

The word "already" in this verse confirms this is a plan that has been working for a long time. The word "work" is translated from the Greek word which describes something energized. It pictures a force propelling something forward or an energy that ignites a process and facilitates it all the way to its conclusion. As used here, it describes a secret plan that has been supernaturally energized to keep things moving toward the fulfilment of its demonic agenda over the ages, like a dark force propelling something toward its pre-planned conclusion.

## UNDERSTANDING END TIMES

Certainly, it's true that believers of every generation have had to deal with issues of moral degradation and societal ills in the world around them. But in the last of the last days, it will seem that all restraints will be thrown off and society will gallop on a collision course with disaster. And the closer we get to the end, the deeper this lost world will sink into deception and depravity.

But rather than fear or run looking for a place to hide, we must press into Christ and clothe ourselves with the power of the Holy Spirit so we can make a mark for eternity in as many lives as possible before this current age ends. The opportunity before us is remarkable and unprecedented. But we must also stay alert to the fact that we are living in the last minutes of the age, relatively speaking, when the devil is attempting to groom and modify society as a whole so that it will receive the Man of Lawlessness.

## THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY IS A PRECURSOR TO THE REVEALING OF THE ANTICHRIST - THERE'S JUST ONE OBSTACLE TO THIS APPEARING...

Looking again at Second Thessalonians 2:7, Paul said, *"For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."*

Herein, Paul stated that not only has the restrainer been restraining in the past, but this restrainer also "will do so" — in other words, will continue to be a restraining force — in the future. This means whoever this restraining force is, was active at the time Paul was writing, and it will continue to be active all the way to the end of the age. Paul declared that there has been and will be a supernatural restrainer holding back and preventing the forces of evil from fully taking control.

Paul stated that the Antichrist will not be revealed *"...until he [the restrainer] be taken out of the way"* (2 Thessalonians 2:7). In this phrase, Paul declared that the restrainer will suddenly disappear, suddenly be removed, or suddenly be "taken out of the way" As a phrase, it means the restrainer will:

- suddenly and surprisingly disappear.
- be removed.
- suddenly and surprisingly be taken out of the midst of everything.

When this day comes, this hindering force that has continuously delayed the worldwide domination of evil and lawlessness will be removed from the earth. It will be as though this force is suddenly lifted out of the middle of everything - and at that moment, the evil forces that have long been suppressed will no longer be held back, but will be freed, and their wicked plans, purposes, and desires will be abruptly energized. These events will come quickly and with no hesitation once the restrainer is out of the picture.

Paul has indicated that whoever or whatever this restrainer is, its presence can currently be found in the midst of everything, or in every facet of society. And only when this restrainer is removed, *"...then shall that lawless one be revealed..."* (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

## WHO, OR WHAT, IS THE RESTRAINING FORCE THAT IS CURRENTLY HOLDING BACK THE MANIFESTATION OF THE ANTICHRIST AND EVIL?

Throughout history, there have been five notorious opinions about who, or what, the great restrainer is that's holding down, holding back, preventing, suppressing, restraining, or hindering the manifestation of the Antichrist and evil that accompanies him at the end of the age. I must point out that the Greek words to describe this restrainer in verses 6 and 7 are both neuter and masculine in the original text. This implies that the identity of the restrainer may be a thing, a person (or persons), or both.

The first opinion was that it was the "Roman Senate" at the time, this is false. The second opinion is that it was the Archangel Michael. It cannot be him because from expounding the words Paul used in the

Greek text, we see that he stated very clearly that the restrainer at the present moment can be found in the midst of every facet of society. The archangel Michael does not fit this description as he, as a singular force, is not in the midst of everything in the world at this time.

The third opinion is the Preaching of the Gospel which again cannot be the restrainer because the preaching of the Word of God will never be removed, not even in the seven years of the Tribulation, for during that time frame, Revelation 7:4-8 tells us that there will be 144,000 Jewish preachers who will preach the truths of God's Word even in that dark season. So even with all the powerful effects that preaching the Word of God has upon society, it specifically is not the restraining force that Paul was referring to in Second Thessalonians 2:6 and 7.

The fourth opinion is the Holy Spirit is the Restainer but the Holy Spirit will never be removed, suddenly caught away and taken, from the earth. Even during the time of the Great Tribulation, there will be many people who respond to the Gospel and repent in response to the preaching of 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see Revelation 7:4). Scores of people will be saved during that time (see Revelation 7:9-17).

And as is always the case, for anyone to be saved, it requires the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the consummate "Change Agent" who, in the new birth, removes one's "heart of stone" — or the old, unregenerate nature of sinful man — and plants within him or her a new, born-again spirit. It is impossible for anyone to be saved without the work of the Spirit. In Ephesians 2:1, Paul stated that unsaved people are « ...dead in trespasses and sins."

Thus, if people are going to be saved during the Tribulation — and they will be saved in large numbers according to Revelation 7:9-17 - it will necessitate the presence of the Holy Spirit in the earth. This means the specific restrainer Paul wrote about in Second Thessalonians cannot be the Holy Spirit. Even in the darkest times of the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit will be in the earth so that people may repent and be eternally saved.

The fifth and possibly who the restrainer is – is the church of Jesus Christ. There are others who believe the Church is the restraining force that Paul wrote about in Second Thessalonians 2:6 and 7. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus' spoke of the prevailing power of the Church even against the gates of hell. He said, *"...I will build my church-and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!"*

Please remember that whoever, or whatever, the restraining force is, it is currently in the midst of every facet of society. There are believers in the business world, in the athletic world, in arts, in education, in government, in the medical field, and in every sphere of life. In fact, of all the previously mentioned beliefs about the restraining force, only the Church can be found in every facet of society throughout the world.

Since the rapture of the Church is a core New Testament doctrine that Paul says will occur one day, it categorically means a time is coming when the Church is going to be "taken out of the way.?" Or, as the Greek text says, it will suddenly disappear, it will be suddenly removed, and it will be suddenly taken out of the way — exactly as Paul states in Second Thessalonians 2:7. And according to Paul, when the restrainer is removed, in that exact synchronized moment, the Lawless One, or the Antichrist, will no longer be restrained, and he will thusly be revealed to the world.

... To be continued Next Week