

Study 14 – Book of Second Thessalonians

Topic: The Man of Lawlessness

Study text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Outline

- I. Don't be swayed (1-3)
- II. The man of lawlessness (4-8)

I. Don't be swayed (1-3)

Discussion Questions

- What reminder does Paul give to the Thessalonians?
- Why do you think Paul would tell them this?

Cross-References

1 John 4:1 – Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Galatians 1:8 – But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!

2 Corinthians 11:4 – For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

Verse by Verse Study

1. And our gathering together to Him – This is another reference to the rapture, which Paul taught about in-depth in 1 Thessalonians 4. At this event, believers around the world will be gathered together to Christ.

2. That you not be quickly shaken from your composure – There are a lot of false teachers in the world. Ultimately this is Satan's work. God sends His message through the world (believers) to bring people to Himself. Satan sends his message into the world through false teachers to turn people farther and farther away from God. One of Satan's deceptions is that he tells people that Jesus has already returned. Do you know of any cults which teach this? There is a famous cult in China which teaches that Jesus has already returned as a woman in South China. Many such cults exist all over the world.

Some of Satan's attacks are aimed at the world, such as atheism. Satan wouldn't get very far trying to convince committed believers that there is no God. So, for the church, he changes tactics. There is a chance he could convince ill-prepared or immature church members who don't know any better that Jesus has already returned. Once Satan has done this, he won't stop. Instead, he will continue deceiving more and more, such as this returned Jesus offers new revelation which contradicts the Scripture. The result will be a group of people which believe in Jesus in name, but in actuality, their belief is very far from orthodox. Paul's exhortation for them and us is not to be quickly shaken or disturbed by this. In other words, be steadfast.

3. Let no one in any way deceive you – If you are deceived by something, are you responsible for it? This verse makes it appear that you are still responsible. Paul says not to let anyone deceive us. We can protect ourselves from being misled and prevent it from happening. How? Knowing the truth is the best protection against deception. If you know the truth, you will realize when someone tells you a lie.

Like the believers in Acts 17:11, you have to learn to study it on your own and often ask yourselves the question, “Does the Bible say that?” Even if you haven’t read through all the Bible yet, you can still ask the Bible teacher to show you where, in the Bible, the source of his opinion is from. If you hear questionable things, don’t make a judgment on them immediately. Instead, go home and study the issue for yourself until you can conclude what Scripture really says. This was ultimately a scheme of Satan which prevented people from being able to detect false teaching, of which there was much during that time.

4. The apostasy must come first – Apostasy means a falling away from the truth. Many Christians are looking for the Antichrist, but this verse clarifies that there must be apostasy before the Antichrist. Paul is saying that in those last days, the church or people who once professed Christ will turn away from Scriptural truth. This Scriptural truth includes the essence of the gospel, such as Jesus’ manhood and divinity, His virgin birth, His crucifixion and bodily resurrection three days later, the Trinity, literal six-day creation, etc. Apostasy would not include the church disagreeing about issues which are a bit vague or ambiguous, such as eschatology. Instead, it denotes a falling away from clear Biblical teaching.

What, then, are some of the signs of apostasy? Is it occurring today? I read an interesting article in which the author wrote a list of several areas where people in the church or people who claim to be Christians are falling away from the truth.

Here are a few of the ways mentioned:

- A. Denial of basic doctrines such as the Trinity.
- B. Denominational divisions.
- C. Ordination of homosexuals.
- E. Using the Lord’s name in vain.
- H. Evolution.
- I. Marketing and merchandising (trying to get rich from the gospel).

Fifty years ago in America and perhaps a hundred years ago in Europe, the majority of people professed to be Christians. They basically believed in the Bible. That has quickly and drastically changed. False teaching has made massive inroads into Western culture and is making inroads into the church. So-called churches allow homosexuals to be ordained. The Pope says animals can go to heaven. Seminary teachers deny 6-day creation and embrace evolution. The list goes on and on. The clear teaching of Scripture has been tossed aside as the church caves to cultural pressures. Sometimes the church has even strategically compromised in order to “become like the world to win the world.” Even if people are “won” with this strategy, they are won to something different than what God intended.

Q: How can you remain steadfast even as people compromise all around you? (James 1:6-8).

II. The man of lawlessness (4-8)

Discussion Questions from the passage

- What kind of person would seek to deceive you? Have you ever met any of these false teachers?
- What is apostasy? Would you say that the apostasy has come yet? Why or why not?
- What does the “man of lawlessness” refer to? Why is he called the “son of destruction”?
- What will this person do? Has this happened yet?
- What does verse 6 mean? What is restraining this man? When does this verse say he will come?

Study on the Book of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

- Who is he who now restrains?
- How will this epic battle between good and evil end? What lessons can we learn from this ending? Why is the ending so important?

Mark 13:14 – When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

1. Man of lawlessness – This figure has a lot of names in Scripture. Can you think of others? Some of his names are Son of destruction, Antichrist, the beast, and abomination of desolation. He is described clearly in this passage as one who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship. The Antichrist will declare himself to be the one true God. Every person of every religion and faith around the world will be required to worship him. We will see in verse 9 that this will be Satan’s doing. Thus, this chapter reveals part of Satan’s endgame to us. From the beginning, he revolted against God because he wanted to be God instead of worshiping God. He wanted the glory and power for himself.

For a brief period in the future, he will appear to get it. Satan’s pride and ego know no bounds. At this point, the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem (or he couldn’t seat himself in the temple), and he will sit (probably on a throne) there and display himself as God. Daniel 7:8 shows that he is the great boaster. He will utter blasphemy against God like no other. (For more on the beast, see Revelation 13.)

The below references are from Revelation 13.

- A. He will receive a “fatal” wound and be healed (13:3). It appears this will be Satan’s attempt to imitate the resurrection.
- B. The whole earth will follow him. It will partially be this miracle healing which will convince them (13:3).
- C. They will also worship the dragon, which appears to be Satan and from which the beast receives his power (13:4).
- D. He will speak great blasphemy and arrogant things (13:5).
- E. His rule is limited to three and a half years (13:5).
- F. He will make war with the saints and win (13:7).
- G. Every unbeliever will worship him (13:8).
- H. He will perform great signs (13:13).
- I. He will make an image (13:14).
- J. This image will miraculously be able to speak and will kill those who don’t worship it (13:15).
- H. He will make everyone get the mark of the beast if they want to buy and sell (13:16-17).

2. While I was still with you, I was telling you things – The Thessalonians needed reminders. Paul had taught them this before. But after he left, it appeared false teachers came in and confused them. The Thessalonians needed to be reassured and reminded of what they had already been taught. It is very critical for Bible teachers to follow Paul’s example of reminding and reviewing. Teaching something once and then forgetting about it is not enough. If something is taught only once, it probably will be forgotten. Gentleness and patience are required to keep reminding instead of becoming exasperated when the lesson is forgotten.

3. And you know what restrains him now – Well, the Thessalonians knew, but no one is so sure. What restrains the Antichrist? Some say it is the church, which will be removed at the rapture, allowing Satan to move forward with his plans. Some say it is human government. Some say it is the Holy Spirit (or the Holy Spirit through the church) who will reduce His presence after the rapture or completely leave.

General opinion (and it is just an opinion because it is not clear) is that this restraint refers to the Holy Spirit. No one thinks that people in the church can restrain Satan or the Antichrist, who would be powerful at the time. The only one who can do this is God. I don't believe that the Holy Spirit will completely abandon the world after the rapture but will instead act in a similar role to that which He had in the Old Testament. At that time, He did not indwell all believers. Whether or not this restraining force is the church or the Spirit, it is certain that God is responsible for it and chooses to remove it in His perfect timing.

Satan and his minions (the mystery of lawlessness) are already at work. Evil is at work in this world. The good news for us is that God does not allow evil to continue unchecked. If God were to leave the world and its people to themselves (as some claim He has done), it would be a FAR bleaker and more corrupt society than it is right now. It is God's grace that allows the world to be as it is today. In what ways does God restrain evil?

A. Philippians 2:15 – He restrains evil through believers, who are His lights in the world. Believers preach God's message to the world, influencing even people who don't believe in Him to do what is right. For example, a person with a dirty mouth may control himself around his Christian relatives whom he knows do not approve of it. How can you be a light in the dark and help to restrain evil around you?

B. Romans 13:1-4 – Government is established by God as a deterrent to sin and a force which upholds order and generally the common good.

C. Jude 1:7-8 – Restraint through direct punishment of people or angels who go beyond the limit. These angelic beings were not allowed to continue wreaking havoc and spreading their evil. God may decide to immediately judge anyone anytime and anywhere.

4. Whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth – All of the world will worship and follow the Antichrist. Some will do it because they truly believe him. Many will likely do it out of fear. Through manipulation, signs, and threats, the Antichrist will draw all non-believers to himself. He will be the single most powerful ruler the world has ever seen. All the armies of the earth will be at his disposal. The very most advanced weapons will all be his. The Antichrist will have more than enough firepower to wipe out the entire earth's population.

Jesus will return for an epic battle of the ages. Only this battle will not be like the give-and-take, up-and-down conflicts you may see in the movies. Though the buildup to this battle will be riveting, the actual battle will be over almost as soon as it begins. As soon as Jesus returns, He will slay this Antichrist with the breath of his mouth. As powerful as he was, his threat to Jesus is even less than an ant is to us.

Psalms 2:4 – The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

Application: What applications can you make from our lesson today? Why is Jesus' great power important to your life today? How should it change how we act and the decisions we make?