

THE RESTRAINING ONE

A Bible Study on II Thess. 2:1-12

Notes by Jack W. Langford, Feb., 1997

INTRODUCTION

When the apostle Paul was used by God in the conversion of a sizable number of residents in the Grecian city of Thessalonica, he not only taught them the basics of salvation and godly Christian living, but he also taught them truths about the second coming of Jesus Christ and even about the appearance of the Antichrist (II Thess. 2:5).

Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica because of persecution. A short time later he wrote the first epistle which spelled out in clear definition two aspects of these great end time events. First, there was the clear statement regarding what has come to be called “the blessed hope” for the believers which was new revelation—“this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord” (I Thess. 4:15). They would experience not only the resurrection of saints who had fallen asleep in death, but the living saints as well would be changed and transported together with the resurrected dead up into the air to meet Christ at His appearance for them (I Thess. 4:13-18). Then in the next chapter of the epistle Paul spoke of the prophetic “Day of the Lord” involving Christ’s coming in solemn judgment and wrath to be poured out upon the unbelievers (I Thess. 5:1-11). This was not new revelation. It had been prophesied by the Hebrew prophets and by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry to Israel (see Matt. 24 & 25). However, the order in which Paul revealed and explained these two events is, no doubt, the simple order in which they will occur. What we now popularly call “the Rapture of the Church” will take place first. The Rapture is in close proximity to and will immediately be followed by “the Day of the Lord” which is primarily characterized by wrath.

Then a short time later Paul writes his second inspired letter to the Thessalonians and there are three areas of concern which he brings to their attention. The first concern had to do with the severe persecution the Thessalonians were suffering—Chapter One. The second had to do with false teaching that had been propagated to the Thessalonians about the timing of events surrounding the Day of the Lord and the Rapture of the Church—Chapter two. The third concern had to do with the laziness or rather deliberate idleness of certain members of the congregation—Chapter Three. In this Bible study we are going to focus upon an aspect of Chapter Two concerning the One Who is said to be “restraining” the Antichrist.

A FALSE REPORT

It had apparently been propagated among the Thessalonians by false reports, as if from Paul himself, that the “Day of Christ (or the Lord) *had come*” (II Thess. 2:2, NKJV). In other words, some had said that the time period of the “Day of the Lord” was already present upon the world. In addition, these individuals were saying that Paul,

himself, had taught this. Of course that teaching would soberly startle the saints into an immediate, false expectancy of all that was involved in the Day of the Lord. Perhaps some had even used this as an excuse to stop working. It would also cause confusion in their minds about when they would be caught up to meet Christ in the air. Thus, this second Chapter of II Thessalonians is written to clear up misconceptions that were formed due to the false reports they had heard.

In verse one of Chapter two Paul introduces the subject on the basis of the Lord's coming and the gathering of the saints together to the Lord, "*Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you...*" This was most certainly a comforting hope (I Thess. 4:18). This hope, situated as it is at the beginning of Paul's discussion, would also indicate that it was the first thing on the agenda for the future anticipation of the saints. It becomes, therefore, a double comfort for them in that it should not be erased by the thought of their plunging into the time of the "Great Tribulation" which characterizes the "Day of the Lord."

"THE DAY OF THE LORD"

The fact that the Thessalonians may have erroneously thought that they could actually already be living in the time of "the Day of the Lord" indicates that the expression, "the Day of the Lord," as it is used here, does not mean its narrow restricted sense of the actual second coming of Christ in judgment. The second coming of Christ in judgment upon the world is normally what is meant by the term, "the Day of the Lord." However, this expression is also sometimes used in its broader and all inclusive sense of meaning the whole time frame of events surrounding the second coming. This includes the events immediately preceding the second coming of the Messiah, His actual second coming, and then the Kingdom that will follow. This should be distinguished from "The day of Christ" as it relates to the Church.

This time frame would include the seven year covenant of Antichrist wherein God re-activates His specific dealings with the nation of Israel, the Temple and the sacrificial services. The last 3 ½ years of this period is called "The Great Tribulation" (Matt. 24:15-31). This will be climaxed by the glorious and powerful event of Christ's second coming in judgment and to reign on earth. In Revelation 1:10 we actually have an illustration of this broader use. It can be literally translated that John "came to be in the Spirit in the Lord's Day, or the Day of the Lord." Thus John was inspired to write of all the events revealed to him about this seven year time period, including "the Great Tribulation," the second coming of Christ in judgment and finally His Millennial Reign on earth. All this is the subject of the book of Revelation and comes under the heading, "The Day of the Lord."

TWO INDICATORS

Paul then states two very important qualifications that must exist before anyone could know that they were in the time frame of the Day of the Lord. The first was that there must come a total "apostasy" (the falling away or departure) and secondly, "The Man of Sin" must make his appearance. Both these indicators must take place before anyone could know that he was in the "Day of the Lord." Since neither of these had

taken place, obviously the Day of the Lord had not come as the false reports had indicated. Concerning these two indicators, which must exist before the Day of the Lord would be present, information can be gathered from other parts of the Scriptures to fill in our understanding about them. We will now draw on that information.

“THE APOSTASY”

“First,” “the falling away” (King James) or more literally, “the apostasy.” The Greek word used here is the noun *“apostasia”* which is and means when transliterated, “apostasy.” This is the way this word is consistently translated in the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Septuagint (Josh. 22:22; II Chron. 29:19; 39:19; Jer. 2:19 & 29:32). The same is true in the Greek Apocrypha (I Macc. 6:14). Finally, in the Greek New Testament the word is understood the same way—Acts 21:21 is translated “to forsake (Moses).” Therefore, the Greek Lexicons will always give the word *“apostasia”* the meaning of “defection or departure (from truth), or apostasy.” In addition, the word is next of kin to *“apostasion,”* which means “divorcement” (Matt. 5:31; 19:7 & Mark 10:4). Therefore we can also say, by way of further clarification, that this apostasy will be a “divorcement” from the truths of Christ and true Biblical Christianity. It is true, as some have pointed out, that the base verb for this word simply means “departure,” but that base is not what is used in these passages. Consequently, Paul says that prior to the day of the Lord, there must first come “the apostasy.” “The apostasy” must precede that event and be a condition at that time.

Christ, Himself, already spoke of many “false prophets” pretending to be the Messiah, or saying the Messiah is here or there, deceiving many at that end time (Matt. 24:4,5). The apostles of Christ, likewise, spoke of this terrible apostasy in the last days—II Pet. 2; I John 2:18-23; 4:1-6; II John 7-11 and Jude 5-19. The apostle Paul, in particular, gives further revelation in his last epistles. It is a great warning to the saints about the building and culmination of this apostasy during this present Church Dispensation—I Tim. 4:1-5; II Tim. 3:1-17 and 4:1-5.

“THE MAN OF SIN”

The second indicator is the appearance of the “Man of Sin” or “Son of Perdition,” whom we commonly call “the Antichrist.” Paul speaks about him in verses 3-12 in this section of II Thessalonians. Christ spoke of him as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, 24:15. In the book of Daniel we have the primary information about this coming world ruler under several different chapters and figures—see Dan. 7:8, 11, 20-26; 8:9-14, 23-26; 9:27; 11:21-45 and 12:11. This world ruler of the last days will be the head of a ten nation confederacy. He will become a very successful ruler causing “craft to prosper.” He will bring about temporary peace and successfully put down any opposition through the use of mighty force at his disposal. He will be lifted up with such pride as will cause him to declare himself as “god” and suppress all other religions, including “warring against the saints” of God at that time. He will apparently engineer a seven year peace between Israel and other nations. In the middle of that time he will break the covenant, enter into Jerusalem and the Temple and defile it, making the Temple of God his own headquarters in blasphemy. The last 3 ½ years of his reign will be the

time of “the Great Tribulation.” Christ will destroy the Antichrist by the power and brightness of His coming. Remember also, that actually Paul had already told the saints at Thessalonica some things about this “Man of Sin” when he was present with them (II Thess. 2:5). Now Paul will tell them that there was One preventing or “restraining” the appearance of the Antichrist.

“THE RESTRAINING ONE”

At this juncture the apostle Paul introduces another factor or Person—One Who “restrains” the appearance of the Antichrist and his program of lawlessness. The identity of the One restraining has been hotly debated for many years partly because there seems to be a bit of mystery as to His identity—Paul did not actually name the Restrainer or spell out specifically what it is, if it is not a person. I will show in this study that the identity of the Restrainer becomes obvious in light of Biblical truths. Many people simply don’t want to accept the clear implications against their own theories if the identity is, in fact, the Person of the Holy Spirit.

In this regard it should be noted at the beginning that whoever this Restrainer is was no mystery to the Thessalonians. It was common knowledge to them, as Paul indicates—“and now you know *what* is restraining...*He Who* is now restraining” (verses 6 & 7). This strongly implies that every reader of this letter, which Paul encouraged to be read everywhere, should also know this “Restrainer.” And if every believer should know Him, certainly we should know Him! As we compare Scripture with Scripture there will be confirmed to us the simple and common knowledge as to Who this Restrainer is—

THE RESTRAINER IS THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Scriptural Reasons Are:

No. 1) The Holy Spirit of God has always been a restraining force against evil.

The Scriptures will testify of this for different Ages:

When the world came to be in rebellion against God in the days of Noah, God said, “*My Spirit will not always strive with men...*” (Genesis 6:3). In other words, the restraint of the Spirit of God against wickedness would cease in that age, and then the judgment would come. This is similar to what happens at the end of this Age.

On behalf of the nation of Israel, when they were in obedience to God’s Word, God would often protect them through the agency of the Holy Spirit restraining the enemy. “*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him*” (Isaiah 59:19).

In addition, when Israel herself rebelled against God it was said, “*But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit*” (Isaiah 63:10).

Also, for and during this present Church Age it is stated, “And when He is come (the Holy Spirit), He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). That means that the Holy Spirit is a restraining influence during this Age. Thus in every age the Holy Spirit has been a restraining factor against sin and

rebellion. This was no mystery. This is common knowledge to both Jewish and Gentile believers in the Church.

**No. 2) The Holy Spirit is specifically said to be a restraining factor against
The spirit of Antichrist—I John 4:2-4,**

*“By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the **Antichrist**, which you have heard **was coming**, and **is now already in the world**. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He Who is in you **is greater** than he who is in the world.”*

This Scripture is unmistakably similar to what the apostle Paul said in II Thessalonians 2. Paul said, “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work.” John said the spirit of Antichrist is “now already in the world.” Paul said the lawless one will yet be “revealed in his own time” at the future last day. John said the same, “You have heard (Antichrist) was coming,” meaning in the future last day. Paul then indicates that there is a greater One Who is presently a “restraining” influence against the lawless one. John as well also says that the Holy Spirit in the believer “is greater” (more powerful) than the spirit of Antichrist, and thus the One Who is containing or restricting him. Language could hardly be any plainer in giving us the identification of the One of Whom the apostle Paul was speaking.

**No. 3) The Administration of The Holy Spirit is in Opposition to the
Administration of Lawlessness under Antichrist.**

The Antichrist will eventually head the Administration of Lawlessness (II Thess. 2:7,8). Paul says this lawlessness is already “at work.” Paul calls it “the mystery of lawlessness” (verse 7).

The present Church Age is operating under the direction of the Holy Spirit Who is now in residence on earth in the body of believers and is said to be operating the “Ministration of Righteousness” (II Corinthians 3:9, literal translation). Furthermore this righteousness is referred to as “great is the mystery of Godliness” (I Tim. 3:16).

Obviously a corollary emerges. The Church and its Ministration under the direction of the Holy Spirit is in opposition to the Ministration of Lawlessness. The full unleashing of “*lawlessness*” without restrictions cannot go into effect until the impediment by the “*Ministration of Righteousness*” ceases. You can have some lawlessness during “*the reign of righteousness*” (Romans 5:21), and you can have some righteousness during “*the reign of lawlessness*” (as in the Great tribulation). However, you cannot simultaneously have “*the reign of lawlessness*” during “*the reign of righteousness*” because two contradictory and conflicting administrations cannot be in full operation at the same time. One must yield to the other.

It becomes obvious, therefore, that the present Administration of the Holy Spirit stands as a restraining force against the full unleashing of lawlessness headed by the Antichrist. The Holy Spirit of God, Who has taken up His residence on the earth since the beginning of the Church Age, must remove Himself “out of the midst” (II Thess. 2:7, literal translation) of this earthly system so that Antichrist can reign. As long as the Holy Spirit is in residence upon the earth, Satan cannot take up his residence here in the person of Antichrist. As long as this “Ministration of the Spirit” continues, the reign of Antichrist will be held in abeyance. When the Holy Spirit does remove Himself “out of the midst,” then the Antichrist will be revealed and will reign, being indwelt by Satan, himself. This is somewhat similar in nature to what happened in Noah’s day. Lawlessness kept pressing in upon the world. The Holy Spirit kept striving with mankind in restraint. But, “My Spirit will not always strive with men,” God warned (Genesis 6:3). And when the time came for the Holy Spirit to stop, the horrible judgment of the flood came upon that ungodly world.

No. 4) The amazing Gender Switch.

The One restraining in verse Six is spoken of in the neuter gender, “*what (or that) is restraining.*” Whereas, in verse Seven the same is spoken of in the masculine gender, “*He Who now restrains*” and “*He is taken out of the way.*” This gender switch is one of the fingerprints to the identity of the Holy Spirit. The word Spirit in the Greek language is in the neuter gender and yet the Spirit is a Person and is spoken of in the masculine gender—“*He.*” In Romans 8:16 and 26 we have the same phenomenon of the Holy Spirit being spoken of in the neuter gender, “*the Spirit Itself.*” Though often translated “Himself” it is literally neuter in gender. Yet throughout Romans Eight the Holy Spirit is spoken of as a Divine Person Who indwells and intercedes on behalf of the believer. Thus, elsewhere the Holy Spirit is repeatedly referred to in the masculine gender, “*He.*” See also such passages as John 14:26; 15:26 & 16:7-15 as examples.

No. 5) Only a Divine Person can Restrain this Power of Satan.

If we remember that the rebellion of Antichrist is no ordinary rebellion and that it has been accumulation in potential for nearly 2000 years, then we can see that only the Holy Spirit of God could restrain it. In other words, the Restraining One was working in Paul’s day, and is still doing so to the very end of this Age. In addition, Satan himself, personally on earth, will finally be energizing the Antichrist. Legions of fallen angelic beings will be assisting. Demons from hell will be unleashed. The nations of earth will be in support of Antichrist. There simply is no human instrument, be it individuals or governments, or angels who could be restraining all of this. Only Divinity can do it.

No. 6) No Other Satisfactory Explanation.

It is properly said that there is absolutely no other restraining one, which is common knowledge to believers, that can possibly or suitably fit the demands and magnitude of the requirement of this work as revealed in the Scriptures. Some have postulated that human government could be the restrainer because it was originally

ordained of God to restrain evil among the nations. However, in the case of Antichrist, he and his system *will be the government*, and most certainly he will not be restraining himself. Some have suggested that Michael the archangel will be the restrainer. However, Michael's primary function will be to protect Israel during Antichrist's reign (Dan. 12:1) and not to restrain Antichrist from appearing and functioning.

**No. 7) The removal of the Holy Spirit Serves as the Instrument of the Rapture
Of the Church of Jesus Christ.**

***CONCLUDING REMARKS and DEDUCTION
The Holy Spirit and the Church Leave Together!***

We can understand that when the Holy Spirit of God removes Himself "from the midst" OF THIS EARTH, the Church of Jesus Christ, which is bound up "in the Spirit," will go with Him—Romans 8:11.

"But if the Spirit of Him Who raised up Jesus Christ from the dead dwells in you, He Who raised up Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who dwells in you."

Obviously, when the collective body of Christ, which was "baptized by One Spirit into one body" (I Cor. 12:13), ascends into heaven (I Cor. 15:51-54), the Holy Spirit, Who uniquely composes and indwells that body, will simultaneously ascend in them and they in Him. In fact, the Church's resurrection and Rapture will be by the power and agency of the Holy Spirit.

REMEMBER THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

Let us look at this from the perspective of the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ. Christ promised the twelve that He would send the Holy Spirit to indwell them and to keep them (John 15,16 & 17). At the precise moment the Holy Spirit of God left heaven and took up His residence on earth in the lives of believers, collectively baptizing them into one body on the day of Pentecost some 2000 years ago, the Church of Jesus Christ was instantly created. One moment there had been just a group of believers praying; the next moment the Church of Jesus Christ was brought suddenly into existence. So it will be in a similar manner at the end of the Age. When the Holy Spirit suddenly removes Himself from this earth the Church as well will no longer be present. One moment it was there; the next instant it will be gone—G-O-N-E! The earth will no longer be the Holy Spirit's residence, and the earth will no longer be the Church's residence as well. The Church will be missing—the heavens being our destiny.

We can understand that since the Antichrist, at the head of a ten nation confederacy, begins his seven year covenant of peace involving the nation of Israel and others, the removing of the Holy Spirit and the Rapture of the Church takes place simultaneously immediately prior to that time period.

THE END