

# The Restrainer

2 Thessalonians: 2:5-8

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## 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? <sup>6</sup> And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time.

<sup>7</sup> For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. <sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, <sup>10</sup> and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

### v5 – Why did Paul have to remind the Thessalonians of these things?

They had forgotten because they were concerned that they had missed out on the rapture and was in the Tribulation because of the severe persecution they were experiencing.

- Paul was only with the Thessalonians a few weeks (Acts 17:1-10). But Paul thought it important to teach these brand new Christians about Biblical prophecy, and he taught them in some detail.

### v6-7 – What is holding him back (being restrained)?

The coming into power and the revealing of the Antichrist is being restrained.

### Who is doing this restraining?

Since Satan is the one orchestrating the coming into power of the Antichrist as his agent on earth, only God has the power to restrain him. And since the Holy Spirit is the presence of God on earth during the current Church Age, He is the Restrainer.

- The Restrainer is keeping the Antichrist from coming to power while the Church is on earth

Supporting the idea that the Holy Spirit within the church is the restrainer is the fact that the restrainer is referenced both as a thing (neuter gender, verse 6) and as a person (masculine gender, verse 7).

- The power delaying Satan's masterplan to unveil his false messiah must be of God.

- It makes much more sense to say that the Holy Spirit is curbing the devil than a political entity or even an angel.

### What will happen to the Restrainer?

The Restrainer will be taken out of the way

- The Holy Spirit is restraining evil but this ministry will end when the Church is taken out

This marks the end of the Dispensation of Grace: The special presence of the Spirit as the indweller of saints will terminate as abruptly as it began at Pentecost.

- Once the body of Christ has been caught away to heaven, the Spirit's ministry will revert back to what He did for believers during the Old Testament.

### What is the mystery of lawlessness?

Satan and his minions are conspiring to thwart God's plans to call out a people for Himself

- Tares & Wheat growing together (Matt 13)
- Lawlessness is rebellion against God and it will come to full maturity during the Tribulation

### v7 – What does it mean that the secret (or mystery) of lawlessness is already at work?

This great principle of evil is already present in the world. It will be ultimately unveiled in the man of sin, but he does not introduce a *new* wickedness into the world, only an intensity of prior wickedness.

### Why is this lawlessness a secret (or a mystery)?

Right now, this **lawlessness** can only be seen and understood by revelation. Otherwise, it is hidden. It is not open sin and wickedness, but wickedness requiring spiritual discernment to see.

### v8 – What will happen after the Restrainer is taken out of the way?

The Antichrist will not come to power until the evil restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit ends

- The Antichrist will either establish or step into a totalitarian government that will enslave the world
- He will start out representing himself as a friend to Israel but will seek to destroy them and all who will not swear allegiance to him

- God will tolerate un-throttled evil for only a short period and will ultimately destroy the Antichrist when Jesus returns.

Paul probably has Isaiah 11:4 in mind: *He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.* The Isaiah passage refers to the LORD — to Yahweh — but Paul freely used it of Jesus, recognizing that Jesus is Yahweh.

### **v9-10 – What will happen when the lawless one comes to power?**

The Antichrist coming to power will be accompanied with great signs and wonders to deceive people into following him

- God will allow deceptive miracles to dupe all who do not have the spiritual discernment that only comes from a relationship with Christ (see 1 Cor 2:14)  
Matt 24:24 – *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

### **Does spiritual power, signs, or wonders prove that someone is representing God?**

No... Satan can perform his own powerful works, either through deception or through his own resources of power.

### **Who will be deceived by the spiritual power, signs, or wonders that are not of God?**

*those who perish:* Satan's deception can only take root in those who do not receive the love of the truth. These people are ready for the deception of the Antichrist, because they want a lie, and God will allow them to receive their heart's desire.

### **Are we seeing the spiritual power, signs, or wonders that are not of God today?**

Yes... wickedness, aka evil, will grow worse and worse as we get closer to the return of the Lord...

2 Timothy 3:13 – *evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

### **What is evil?**

Evil is usually thought of as that which is morally wrong, sinful, or wicked; however, the word evil can also refer to anything that causes harm, with or without the moral dimension.

- The word is used both ways in the Bible. Anything that contradicts the holy nature of God is evil (Psalm 51:4).
- On the flip side, any disaster, tragedy, or calamity can also be called an "evil" (see 1 Kings 17:20, KJV).

### **Did God create evil?**

God is not the author of moral evil; rather, it is His holiness that defines it. Created in God's image, we bear the responsibility to make moral choices that please God and conform to His will. He wills our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3) and does not wish us to sin (James 1:13). In repentance and faith in Christ, we have forgiveness of sin and a reversal of the moral evil within us (Acts 3:19). As God's children, we walk according to this command: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*" (Romans 12:21).

### **Why does God allow evil?**

Often cited by atheists as justification for rejecting God

- How could a good God allow evil?
- They don't understand the concept of sin  
...a Just and Holy God demands that there be consequences for usurping His authority
- In a fallen world, evil happens as a consequence of sin

### **How do people being made in the image of God relate to God allowing evil?**

We are made in His image... freedom of choice

- We have exercised our freedom to put ourselves before God ...sin has consequences
- God loved us so much that He wanted us to experience the depth of relationship with Him that is only possible if we are free to accept or reject a relationship with Him  
John 10:10 – *I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*
- If there is to be true free will, God has to allow evil for a time.

### **How does God use evil to help us?**

Romans 8:28 – *all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose*

He uses evil in our lives to bring about a greater good...

- For example: He raised up the Babylonians to help Israel see their need to return to Him
- He used the evil of Jesus dying on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins

### **How does the Holy Spirit restrain evil?**

God orchestrates events to bring about His plans...

Isaiah 46:9-10 – *Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'*

God limits the reach of evil...

Job 1:12 – *the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person."*

While all of earth's rulers are under the influence of Satan, God influences their hearts so that His will be done

- Persian King Xerxes per Esther 6
  - Roman King Augustus prior to Jesus being born
- The Holy Spirit works through His children whom He indwells...

1 Jn 4:15 – *Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

### **How does the Holy Spirit work through children of God to restrain evil?**

The Holy Spirit convicts us to expose evil; we commanded to:

Eph 5:11 – *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*

- Indeed, there will be loss of reward if we fail to speak up when we see evil:
  - Ezekiel 33:9 – *if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.*
- Jesus said His followers are salt and light in Matthew 5:13-14... acting as a preservative helping others know Jesus and shining the light of truth about evil.
  - Exposing evil does reduce its impact...
    - John 3:20 – *For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*

### **How has the Holy Spirit used the United States to restrain evil?**

The US has been known as a Christian nation, indeed, the most preeminent Christian nation on earth...

- We were founded by Christians, made laws based on biblical values, and had the highest percentage of Christians
- We have promoted liberty and crushed tyrants who enslaved their people
- We acted as God's agent to squelch the plans of those who sought to enslave Africans, the Nazis and their allies, and the Soviets.
- We have stood by and encouraged Israel, and the nations who would also befriend Israel
- The US has been a force for good in the world
  - Ronald Reagan characterized America is a shining city upon a hill... a place where people wanted to be and nations wanted to be like.

### **What is the trend for the United States as an agent for restraining evil?**

But this is beginning to change as a foreshadowing of when the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is removed.

- Covid mandates crashing our economy and causing division between people.
- Voting laws have gotten so accommodating to potential voters that fraud is rampant and nothing of any significance is being done about it.
- The US is known as much for its export of entertainment filth as restraining evil in the world
- We have legalized the murder of the unborn and now about 4,000 babies die in the womb every day
- We have encouraged those who have sought to end the Bible's concept of marriage and celebrated immoral lifestyles
- We have institutionalized our national debt which is now \$-many-T; if you don't think that is a great evil...
  - Proverbs 22:7 – *the borrower becomes the lender slave (NAS).*
- We are abandoning our allies like Israel and embracing their enemies such as the Moslem Brotherhood
- There is a growing propensity to appease evildoers and yield our sovereignty to the world community of nations
- We are beginning to see our rule of law being replaced with rule of man and along with it, our freedoms of religion and speech are under assault
- Truth and justice are being replaced with political correctness and social justice which is simply a ruler's view of fairness
- Our mainstream press no longer serves as force which exposes evil; instead it is more of a propaganda agency seeking to manipulate the population
  - Tirelessly prompting their "progressive" ideology
  - Not thoroughly vetting candidates sharing their ideology
  - Publishing flawed opinion polls as news

### **How do we know evil is still being restrained?**

The new normal seems to be the world living with being on the edge of disaster...

- Economic turmoil threatens the stability of the world
- The US debt will eventually cause the dollar to no longer be the world's reserve currency also threatening world stability
- Food shortages are emerging due to bad weather and bad governmental policies (promoting corn ethanol instead of drilling for oil)
  - Human caused global warming is being cited as the reason which is a contrived explanation to justify control of energy which enables people to have more freedom.
  - The ultimate goal here is to control people

### **What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- God is restraining the revealing of the Antichrist.
- The Holy Spirit is working through the church to restrain evil.
- We are seeing God beginning to remove His restraint of evil as birth pangs of the Tribulation.