

The Restrainer

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

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12/5/2021

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Intro:

- Premillennial Perspective: most literal and has Jesus returning in two phases... first for His followers (rapture) and next at the end of the Great Tribulation to establish His promised kingdom on earth.
- Their persecution was so bad, some had thought they were in the Tribulation and thus missed the Rapture
- Paul wrote to clarify why that was not the case thus helping us understand the proper order of events...

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

¹ Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, ² not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. ³ Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ 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. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. ⁷ 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.

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

v1 – What is this gathering together?

The Rapture of the church (this establishes the context)

v2 – What is the Day of Christ?

This is another term for the Tribulation because it culminates in the revelation of Christ to the world.

Why would people be troubled by the Day of Christ?

It will be a terrible time when God is pouring out His judgment on the earth to prepare the nations for the Millennial Kingdom.

v3 – About what should the Thessalonians not be deceived?

That the Tribulation (*Day of Christ*) would not come before the *falling away*. The *falling away* must happen first and since this has not happened, they could not be in the Tribulation.

What is this falling away?

This is either great apostasy (falling away of the faith) or removal of the Church (Rapture)... either way the rapture is implied because the rapture results in zero believers on earth.

Why should we see the Greek word “apostasia” here as a physical departure and not a departure of the faith?

1. A spiritual departure is not unique to the last days of the church; it is too common to be a sign.
2. 2 Thessalonians was an early letter of Paul before he spoke of a spiritual departure as a characteristic of the last days
3. The definite article “the” before the noun “apostasia” denotes that this will be a definite event, not the culmination of a process.
4. The noun apostasia can refer to a physical departure
5. The verb form *aphistemi* is used 15 times in the New Testament, only 3 have anything to do with departure from the faith.
6. The extended context favors a physical departure interpretation
7. The immediate context favors a physical departure interpretation
8. Paul uses diverse terms for the rapture and since 2 Thess is a review, you’d expect him to use a different term.
9. Early Bible translations favor the physical departure interpretation.
10. The physical departure view is held by many credible Bible scholars

How important is the proper understanding of the translation of “apostasia” in rapture doctrine?

It totally makes clear that the rapture is prior to the Tribulation... no other supporting verses would be necessary.

Who is this man who is revealed?

The *man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition* – Antichrist

- Lawless one in v8
- a man possessed by Satan
- Note that the Antichrist cannot come on scene until Church is removed

Why is the Antichrist called the son of perdition?

The phrase simply means “man doomed to destruction” and is not reserved for any one individual. In fact, there are two people to which the title “son of perdition” is applied. In context, John 17:12 is referring to Judas Iscariot, while 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is referring to the “man of lawlessness” —the Antichrist—who will appear in the end times before Christ’s return.

- the connotation is that of a person in an unredeemable state, someone who is already damned while he is still alive.

v4 – What does the man of sin do?

He represents himself as God in the temple... Abomination of Desolation (Matt 24:15 & Daniel)

- there must be a temple in Israel
 - many want it for national identity
 - political situation must change to allow
- Jews realize that the world leader is not their savior but a deceiver

Why did Jesus refer to this event as the abomination of desolation?

An abomination is “something that causes disgust or hatred”; and desolation is “a state of complete emptiness or destruction.”

- Jesus warned that something (or someone) that people detested would stand in the temple someday. When that horror occurred, residents of Judea should seek cover without delay.
- Daniel reveals that the abomination of desolation will occur at the midpoint of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:11)

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.

v6-7 – What is 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

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

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

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 establish 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

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.
- Evil will grow worse and worse as we get closer to the return of the Lord...
2 Tim 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 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...
 - Matthew 5:13-14... *acting as a preservative helping others know Jesus and shining the light of truth about evil. Exposing evil does reduce it’s 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

How do we know that the trend in the United States has to be toward totalitarianism?

The trend toward totalitarianism must continue because the Bible says the world economy during the tribulation will be under the Antichrist’s total control.

Rev 13:17 – *no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.*

What should we do about the rampant voter fraud on a national level... does this mean we shouldn’t vote?

No, restraining evil involves making a judgment to pick the lesser evil when you have a choice.

- God will hold us accountable for our actions or lack of actions.
- I know God is pleased when we align ourselves with the political party that most closely represents biblical values
- I hope all of you will vote keeping in mind which candidates and political party has the most biblical values
- If you are confused by politics because politicians do a pretty good job of avoiding the real issues; a good litmus test is where they stand on abortion... it is amazing how many other ungodly policies are associated with those who have no problem with the murder of unborn babies.

What applications do we see from our discussion today?

- We should allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to restrain evil.
- We can be comforted in the knowledge that our departure happens prior to the Day of Christ.
- God uses evil for good!