



Chapter Two

This is the second time in two letters where Paul dived deeper into issues surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ. It would appear, in verse two, that there were more false teachings being circulated among the believers in Thessalonica, possibly even by letters that were faked to appear as though they were from Paul. The false teaching was that the Day of the LORD had already occurred, which stirred up concerns and fears in their church.

The recurrence of this false teaching in the Thessalonian church is cause for a healthy discussion about how to detect false teaching. Paul begins his thoughts in this chapter listing three ways that false teaching can work its way into a church. Paul corrected them once in his first letter (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-11) yet they opened the door to the same false teaching again some time after.

Paul corrects this false teaching by highlighting two future events that had to take place before the LORD's return: *the rebellion* and the coming of the *man of lawlessness*. These events are contentious subjects and have been discussed and debated for centuries. Rather than contribute to the confusion that exists in the many points of view that are held by believers, this study will focus on what we can know with certainty from Paul's teaching.

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¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

It's interesting to note that Paul lists three different ways that false teaching can be delivered: a spirit, a spoken word, and written word. Let's work backward through these. First, apparently Paul was aware that fake letters were being circulated in the churches, which alleged to be from him. These letters were teaching things that were contrary to what he had taught them in person (see 2:5). Second, there were people who were preaching, teaching, or prophesying things that weren't aligned with Paul's teachings. Paul also warns them not to be alarmed by a spirit, which is a reference to any spirit being who influences and teaches contrary to his teachings. Bottom line: be people of the Word so that we can know when something false is being presented.

Q: Based on your current understanding of God's Word, do you think you can recognize and correct false teachings? (See also 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:15)

Q: If you recognize a teaching as false, how should you go about correcting it? (See also 2 Timothy 2:24-26)





³ Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

First of all, look at verse five. Paul has already told them these things. He touched on all of these issues when he was with them for those few weeks in Acts 17. How quickly they forgot! But we're no different. We forget just as quickly. We need constant reminders of what we've already learned because the enemy is patiently waiting to pervert them the moment they begin to fade from memory.

Q: What are some good habits we can form that will help us remember the things we've been taught? (See also *Ecclesiastes 12:1*)

Let no one deceive you. This is how Paul began his corrective teaching about the Day of the LORD. That should tell us something. There will be deceiving spirits and false teachers who will try to lead the church astray concerning this issue. There will be two events that must *precede* the second coming of Jesus Christ. First, there will be a rebellion. The Greek word that is translated as *rebellion* is the same word where we get the English word *apostasy*. That's an old word, but it means *to fall away or to forsake*. This rebellion will be a falling away from, or a forsaking of the LORD.

Then, second, the man of lawlessness will be revealed. The rebellion, in one way or another, sets the stage for the appearance of the man of lawlessness. Lawlessness appears many times in the New Testament, but 1 John 3:4 offers a clear definition: *sin is lawlessness*. This man of lawlessness, or the son of destruction, or the antichrist (1 Jn 2:22) will elevate himself higher than any god that is worshiped, even higher than Yahweh, the God of gods. He will be so full of himself that he'll even make his throne in the temple of God. While the Apostle John makes it clear that there are already many antichrists present in the world (1 Jn 2:18), Paul puts a finer point on the issue in that this man of lawlessness will be the ultimate and final manifestation of the Antichrist.

Q: As children of the light, we aren't supposed to be caught unaware by Christ's coming. Do you believe we are seeing the rebellion unfold before us? Do you see the LORD being forsaken by humanity at large? (See also *Matthew 24:10*)

Q: How might a rebellion set the stage for the man of lawlessness to arrive? (See also *Daniel 7:25*)





⁶ And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.

While there's much discussion about the identity of the one who restrains, many scholars believe Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit. It isn't a stretch to say that the Holy Spirit is the one restraining the arrival of the man of lawlessness. Jesus called His followers, *the salt of the earth* (Matt 5:13). Salt is a preservative. God's people are indwelt with the Holy Spirit. It would seem that the Holy Spirit is restraining the mystery of lawlessness through the ministry of the church. But as the rebellion approaches (or intensifies), lawlessness will increase, and people's love will grow cold (Matt 24:12). When the LORD decides the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is complete, He will release what was being restrained, and the man of lawlessness will arrive on the world scene.

Q: In one sense, the Spirit-filled ministry of every local church functions as a restrainer of evil. How can we actively engage in pushing back the darkness around us with the light of the Gospel? (See also *Matthew 5:14-16; James 1:22*)

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Before we make too much of the man of lawlessness, it should be said that when Jesus comes, He will destroy this man immediately with nothing more than the breath of His mouth. It's good to remember that Satan is simply no match for Jesus. Satan's best work will be blown away like a dandelion when Jesus returns. However, we should be cautious. The arrival of the Antichrist happens directly through Satan's activities, with powerful false signs and wonders, designed to deceive everyone who doesn't belong to Jesus. Paul notes that the wicked deception is *for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved*.

Q: How should this knowledge affect the way we process and think through current events, political and cultural movements, and social anxieties? (See also *Matthew 10:16; 25:1-13*)





11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In the preceding verses, Satan works through the man of lawlessness with a wicked deception designed to deceive those who have rejected the Gospel. Here, God doubles down on that deception and sends a strong delusion so that these men and women will keep believing what is false. He uses Satan's deception as a punishment against those who reject His Son, Jesus Christ. To make it simple, this means once the man of lawlessness is revealed and his deception is in full swing, at some point God will draw the battle lines. The sides will be fixed. It appears that when this moment in history passes, salvation for those who have rejected the Gospel won't be possible.

Q: Does this create a new sense of urgency to share the Gospel? (See also *Isaiah 55:6*)

13 But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. 14 To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

When we consider all of the horrible things that will transpire before the Day of the LORD, the hope for believers is this: God chose you. If you belong to Him, you have nothing to fear from the coming of the man of lawlessness. His calling upon us is the promise that we will obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus. No matter what we may face, Jesus is worth it. If you can't say that, perhaps you should spend time getting to know Him better. Or, perhaps you don't know Him at all. Paul admonished the Thessalonians to stand firm in light of His calling. We too can stand firm because our salvation doesn't rest upon us choosing Him. He chose us and that is what empowers us to endure.

Q: Standing firm against the big things that are coming is rehearsed in the small things we face each day. In what way does each day challenge us to stand firm? Are there small daily things that shake your faith? (See also *2 Corinthians 2:11*)





¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

As we've studied both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, there is a consistent theme connected to teachings about Christ's return. These teachings should comfort us. The end of 2 Thessalonians 2 concludes Paul's teachings about the second coming, and he finishes it with a prayer for comfort. Jesus Christ's bodily return to the earth is what this whole Christian thing has been pointing toward. If you're just in it for a ticket to heaven, you might be surprised that earth is where we ultimately end up living and reigning with Him. This topic is sorely understated in popular Christianity. Even Christian funerals seldom mention our very earthly future that will begin when we return with Jesus to reign. And yet, this is the hope and comfort of the early church. It's what Paul taught the Thessalonians. It is our hope and comfort as well. We should get to know it.

Q: Why do you think we undersell the comfort and hope in the return of Christ? (See also Revelation 19:11-16)

Notes

A large area of dotted lines for taking notes.



