

12. 2 Thessalonians 2

The main purpose of this chapter is to refute the false teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ has already come. However, Paul also enters into the discussion the revelation of the man of lawlessness who opposes God and exalts himself over everything called God or worshiped. The “man of “lawlessness or “the lawless one” even proclaims himself to be God. Some describe this event as the rise of the Roman Catholic Church with the Pope ascending to the papal chair and setting himself up with titles reserved in the Bible for God; such as:

Reverend--Ps 111:9: “9 He hath sent redemption unto his people; He hath commanded his covenant for ever: **Holy** and **reverend** is his name.” ASV

Father--Matt 23:9-10: “9 And do not call anyone on earth '**father**,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”

Your Holiness: Rev 4:8: “8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

‘Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.’”

And Rev 16:4-5: 4: “The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

‘You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, **the Holy One**,
because you have so judged;’”

We cannot minimize the error taught by centuries of catholic error, especially as it regards the Pope and doctrines found nowhere in the Scriptures. The Catholic Church and its papal hierarchy are just one of many evil manifestations of the lawless one and his sponsor, Satan.

A brief review of the evil and horrible forces marshaling around Satan will help make this passage clear. Paul speaks in broad terms of Satan’s spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places in Eph 6:12:

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Three Entities with One Resembling the Lawless One

The antichrist. At the heart of Satan’s domain are spiritual forces of evil and not merely earthly churches no matter their numbers and false doctrines. These earthy dominions are mere pawn in the epic struggle of good over evil. John names these spiritual forces of evil the antichrist. He introduces them to become influential in our age, but not at the very beginning in 1 John 2:18-19:

18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.
19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

The use of the singular, antichrist, and plural, antichrists, indicates that the earthly minions follow the spiritual force of evil, the antichrist. 1 John 2:22-23 identifies this antichrist as a liar:

22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

John, in his gospel, shows the path of liars from the father of lies the devil, to the spirit of lies, the antichrist, to the earthly minions, or should we say victims. John 8:42-45

43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

The great lying deceit is the denial of Christ words as the truth and the refusal to hear them, and even worse, substituting ones own words as if they were the words of God and Christ. Jesus exposed this deceit of word substitution and abuse in John 12:48-50:

48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. 49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

The beast. The beast in the *Revelation* represents metaphorically the spiritual power of evil, commissioned, as it were, by the dragon himself Rev 13:1-2:

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.

This beast was wounded, possibly by Christ's victory over sin, which the beast fosters continuously according to Rev 13:5-8:

5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. 6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

The wounded beast was joined by another beast in Rev 13:11-17:

11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. 12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. 14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

The second beast, as powerful as the first beast and one with the mission of the first, forced the inhabitants of the first to worship falsely. With miraculous powers, he deceived the nations of the earth.

Thus, the dragon, Satan, the first beast, and the second beast form the coalition of evil in the heavenly places, constituting powerful and spiritual forces of evil dedicated to the spiritual

destruction of all the inhabitants of the earth. They are the triad of evil spoken of in Rev 13:18, with 6 being the imperfect number:

18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

The false prophet. Perhaps, it is that second beast that is called the false prophet in Rev 19:20-21:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The metaphor of the false prophet fits the description of the man of lawlessness, of whom Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The Man of Lawlessness Revealed

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

2 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

In the early church, confusion about the coming of the Lord was nurtured by those sowing discord. In this case, false prophecies, reports and letters contended that he had already come. Even today transmillennialists contend that he came in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:3-4 of those who contended that he was not coming, since he had not come already:

3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?"

Paul's warning to them—"don't let anyone confuse you in any way"—introduced conditions that must be met before the day of the Lord's coming. First, the rebellion comes and man of lawlessness is to be revealed. Some versions say *man of sin*, but the original word is the word for *lawlessness*:

anomia (an-om-ee'-ah); from NT:459; illegality, i.e. violation of law or (genitive case) wickedness: (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.

The word *lawless* is literally without law and, therefore, close in meaning to John's *antichrist*, and to *the Revelation's false prophet*. [See the introduction above.]

Second, he will exalt himself above everything that is called God. He will even proclaim himself to be God. The use of the personal pronoun gives this being the force of personality and makes him the main minion in the devil's "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Eph 6:12). His access to the temple of God is through the devil's ministers, described in 2 Cor 11:13-15:

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

The Coming of the Lawless One According to the Work of Satan

2 Thessalonians 2:5-8

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 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. 8 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.

Since Paul had told them these things, they were already informed of what was holding the lawless one back. From our prospective, the Holy Spirit left to protect the apostles, prophets and early church would have the power to constrain the spiritual forces of evil. The Lord explained this to his disciples before he left. In John 14:25-26, he promised the apostles:

25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

The power of the comforter was enormous and extended spiritual gifts to the early church according to 1 Cor 12:7-11:

7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, **to another distinguishing between spirits**, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

These gifts fully equipped an infant church to survive the attacks of the devil, but they were not permanent. Paul describe this impermanence in 1 Cor 13:8-10

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, **they will be stilled**; where there is knowledge, **it will pass away**. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when **perfection** comes, the imperfect disappears.

Perfection was the perfect law of James 1:25:

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

Therefore, as the apostolic age of the prophetic man—the apostles and holy prophets—ended, the age of the recorded word—permanent forever—took its place. Paul spoke of how this was to happen in Eph 3:3-5:

. . . that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

By the time of these writings, by the apostles and prophets, the forces of evil stirred to be released upon the Lord's people and the all the people of the world. We have already discussed in the introduction how the devil, the beast, and the false prophet will all be destroyed in the lake of fire and brimstone. Here, Paul declares the fate the lawless one: "Whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming."

2 Thess 2:9-12

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

The lawless one goes forward against the church and all the people of the word with a full arsenal provided by Satan: counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil. People who perish in this environment refuse to love the truth and be saved, and they do not believe the truth but delight in wickedness. Those, who follow the deceit of the devil, will be condemned and lost. In effect, they do it to themselves.

The Chosen to Stand Firm and Hold to the Teachings

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

This passage offers the way of escape for true believers who follow God's revealed pathway to salvation. At the same time, the passage serves to destroy any argument favoring the false teaching on predestination of believers. From the beginning God set the standard by which people are sanctified; that is, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and through belief in the truth. All those who believe and obey the truth rather than the devil's lies are set apart as God's children. In this sense, we are called by the gospel. We must stand firm and hold to the teachings of the written word in order to share in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus and God, our Father Encourage Us and Strengthen Us

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Facing the attacks of the devil's forces and maintaining our faith over centuries requires focus. That focus comes from knowing that God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who love us and give us eternal encouragement and good hope, also encourage our hearts in every good deed and word.