

**The Coming Antichrist
2 Thessalonians 1:1-5
Part Three**

If you are here this morning and have embraced Jesus as your Savior and your Lord, then you are at peace with God. Isn't this what the Scriptures teach us? What does **Romans 5:1** say?

"Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." In **Col. 1:19-20** it says, **"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him (Christ), (20) and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross."** Do we believe this?

If we believe this then we can be assured that God will never allow his wrath to be poured out upon us. What did we learn from **1 Thess. 5:9-11**? **"For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (10) Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing."** We do not have to fear a future outpouring of wrath because it is not part of God's plan for us. It cannot be a part of God's plan for us because **"we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

What does this mean practically? It means that we do not have to fear the fires of hell. The Scriptures describe hell as a place where God's wrath will be demonstrated. **Rom. 9:22-23** says, **"What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? (23) And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory."** If you have embraced Jesus as your Savior and your Lord and are therefore at peace with God you are a vessel of mercy. If you have not embraced Jesus as your Savior and your Lord then you are a vessel of what? Wrath. You are simply waiting for the future impending destruction that Paul speaks of here in the fires of hell. Hopefully you know that you are a vessel of mercy. And if you in fact know this to be the case, then you should at this very moment be rejoicing in this glorious reality.

But we are not done. If you and I have made peace with God by embracing Jesus as our Savior and our Lord then we also do not have to fear God's wrath being poured out upon us here as well. God's wrath will not be poured out on you today, or tomorrow or ever. Yes, He may discipline us. The Scriptures tell us that. But His discipline is motivated by what? Love. **Hebrews 12:5-6** says, **"do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; (6) for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines"** Do not be fooled. The discipline of the Lord motivated by love will be a totally different experience than the future judgment of God motivated by wrath that the Scriptures tell us is coming upon this world.

What is this future period of judgment called? It is called "the day of the Lord." This is not a 24 hour period of time but rather a period of extended judgment. I believe that the events leading up to the Day of the Lord begin to unfold shortly after the rapture of the church and continues for a period of 3.5 years. **Matthew 24:8** refers to this period as the "beginning of birth pangs." The actual birth begins to take place at the midpoint of the tribulation. **Matthew 24:21** refers to this period as the great tribulation. This period lasts another 3.5 years and culminates in the coming

of Christ to establish His kingdom.

The Thessalonians had been told God had not destined them for wrath. The Thessalonians clearly understood this teaching to not only include hell but the period of time known as the “Day of the Lord.” They took great comfort in this teaching and rightfully so.

They apparently thought just as Noah and his family were rescued from the flood and Lot and his family were rescued from the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah, they also would be rescued before the great and terrible day known as the day of the Lord. How did they think that they would be rescued? By Jesus Himself coming and gathering them to Himself in the rapture.

But though they had believed this at one point in time, they had been shaken from this belief. They were experiencing severe persecution and a certain individual or individuals had come to them and had convinced them that they were, even now, in the day of the Lord. They apparently were led to believe that they were living sometime between the midpoint in the tribulation and the final cataclysmic judgments associated with the coming of Christ at the very end of the tribulation.

So rather than continuing to enjoy peace, they had become fearful. They were thinking to themselves, “how could this be?” They had been promised that they would be delivered from wrath, and now they are experiencing the day of the Lord. Had they missed the rapture? Or was the gospel a sham? Were they at peace with God or not? Paul writes them and gives them five things they need to avoid if they are going to be free of this kind of fear.

They needed to avoid deception. Look at **VV. 1-4**, “**Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him** (or in other words the rapture) **(2) that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**” They had been taught that they would not enter the day of the Lord. But they had allowed themselves to be deceived. They had allowed themselves to be shaken. To avoid being deceived, we need to know the truth. The Thessalonians at one time knew the truth but they had apparently forgotten the truth. This was the first thing they needed to know.

They needed to avoid forgetfulness. Look at **VV. 3-5**, “**(3) Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, (4) who exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (5) Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?** Paul had told the Thessalonians many different things about the future. He had told them that the day of the Lord could not come until the apostasy and the man of lawlessness was revealed.

These Thessalonians had been deceived. These Thessalonians had been forgetful and it had led to them being shaken and disturbed. It led them to be fearful. Therefore Paul in essence is encouraging them not to be deceived, not to be forgetful. What else does Paul encourage them to avoid in order not to fear?

AVOID IGNORANCE (VV. 6-10)

Paul in **VV. 6-10** in an attempt to educate them and to keep them from being ignorant, shares a great deal of information about the person of the antichrist. Paul conveys four different aspects of his career.

His revealing - We have already talked about the revealing to some degree. We have already noted that his revealing would be when the world sees the antichrist for who he truly is. This revealing would take place at the midpoint of the tribulation. But Paul gives us a great deal more information and we learn from this new information is that the revealing of the antichrist is being restrained (VV. 6-7).

Let us once again look at **2 Thess. 2** and begin to read at **V. 3** and continue to read down through **V. 6**, **“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it (the day of the Lord, that future day when God will pour out his wrath upon this world) will not come unless the apostasy (the abomination of desolation) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) is revealed (uncovered, unveiled, shown to be who is truly is) the son of destruction, (4) who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (5) Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? (6) And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed.**

This verse I believe communicates clearly to us that if Satan had his way, this future individual known as the antichrist would have been on the earthly scene a long time ago. Well, if this is so, then why hasn't he come? He is being restrained! Isn't this clearly what the verse is teaching us? And the restrainer is the Holy Spirit (V. 7).

The word translated “restrains” in **V. 6** is a neuter present participle which conveys to us that the restraining is by an impersonal force. But as we go to **V. 7** there is a significant change. What does **V. 7** say? **“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.”** What is the change? The neuter participle of **V. 6** is changed to a *masculine participle* and therefore we see this reflected in the translation to **“he who now restrains.”**

The antichrist would already be here and revealing himself if it were not for a restraining force keeping him from doing so. This restraining force we learn is being exerted by a particular person, or in other words by a restrainer.

Obviously this person who is restraining is great in power. In fact, He is greater in power than Satan himself. This means that it is God himself who would be restraining. But being even more specific, we would have to identify the restrainer as “God the Holy Spirit.” Right now the Spirit is in this world and He is restraining the revealing of the antichrist. But one day the one who is presently restraining will be **“taken out of the way.”** And when He is taken out of the way, His restraining ministry will end.

The Holy Spirit has many different ministries. And one of those ministries that we learn about here is the ministry of restraining. Just as Christ came into the world at the time appointed by the Lord, which we see in **Gal. 4:4**, so also will the antichrist. The antichrist will not be revealed either before or after God has determined. And it is the work of the Spirit of God to make sure of this.

Though the person of the antichrist is being restrained, the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Look at **V. 7**, “**For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.**” The true character of lawlessness is already at work. But we have not yet seen the final picture of it. It is true according to **2 Tim. 3:13** that evil men will proceed from bad to worse in our present age. But we have not yet seen what lawlessness is truly like in its full and complete expression.

Because the full expression of lawlessness has not been seen and cannot be understood or appreciated until the man of lawlessness is revealed, it is referred to as a mystery.

So monstrous will the depths of iniquity be plumbed by the man of lawlessness, human thought can never fully conceive the depths apart from revealing of the antichrist made possible by the Holy Spirit when he ends His restraining ministry and steps aside.

This is foreboding. I believe that most of us here this morning can see various expressions of lawlessness at work in our society and in the world as a whole. I believe that most of us here this morning can even see the various expressions of lawlessness increasing. But if I were to give you an assignment and say to you detail out for me the final form to which this lawlessness will evolve, you will be unable to do this. Why? Because it is a mystery and no matter how far you go to plumb the depths of lawlessness, you will not have gone far enough. But one day the Holy Spirit will step aside and no longer restrain. This will happen sometime after the rapture of the church and the midpoint of the tribulation (V. 7).

The spirit of lawlessness is present. The mystery of lawlessness is at work. But the apostasy and the man of lawlessness, as well as the mystery of lawlessness, cannot be revealed until the one who now restrains “**is taken out of the way.**” Therefore this will be sometime after the rapture and before the midpoint of the tribulation.

Don't be misled by this phrase “**is taken out of the way.**” When the Holy Spirit ceases his restraining ministry, which allows the antichrist to be revealed and the mystery of lawlessness to be clearly seen, it does not mean that the Holy Spirit will disappear from this planet. As a member of the Godhead, the Spirit is omnipresent, has always been in the world, and He certainly will continue to be present during the Great Tribulation. The Holy Spirit is taken out of the way only in the sense that He steps aside.

Satan wants to move forward with his plans. He wants to have the freedom to bring the antichrist to the forefront. He wants to seek to exalt him and through him receive the worship of the world. But Satan is presently being restrained by the Holy Spirit from doing this. Yes, we see the spirit of the antichrist today. Yes, we can see the mystery of lawlessness at work today. But it is only the tip of the iceberg and the depths of what lies ahead is at this point impossible for us to fully

comprehend. But when it is revealed then it will be the trigger that brings forth various expressions of the wrath of God throughout the second half of the tribulation culminating with the final cataclysmic judgment of God at the end of the tribulation when Christ comes down from heaven, with his mighty angels in flaming fire.

CONCLUSION

The Thessalonians had embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as a result of this they had been led to believe by Paul that they had been delivered from the wrath that was to come. Not only the fires of hell, but even the day of the Lord.

But some individual or individuals had come to them and had shaken their faith. And raised the possibility that they were now in the day of the Lord. As a result they were now filled with fear concerning matters of the last days.

This is not what the Lord wants for us and it is important that we

avoid deception

avoid forgetfulness

and avoid ignorance