***The Mystery of Lawlessness

RV212-02***

We are studying Revelation 17:1-18. Our subject is "Ecclesiastical Babylon." This is segment number nine.

Following the Noahic flood, mankind gravitated as a whole from the East, from the landing site of Mount Ararat, toward the land of Shinar between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which lie today in the land of Iraq, the territory of Saddam Hussein. The descendants of the ark survivors, after a few generations, demonstrated that they were not going to be subject to God's command to disperse themselves around the earth. Instead, they huddled together on the riverbanks, and proceeded to create a very sophisticated civilization. This refusal, however, in itself, evidenced something that was widespread in the minds of the people who had now been propagated to replenish the earth following the flood, and that was a great rebellion against God.

**Babel (Babylon)**

In this context arose a man named Nimrod, who took advantage of this rebellion against God, and demonstrated that by refusing to disperse. Nimrod was one of those personalities who soon became a powerful leader over the earth's expanding population. He proceeded to remove the fear of the living Creator God for mankind so that they would feel comfortable in disobeying Him. They proceeded to create a civilization that did not have to be subject to the God who had made them. Nimrod himself, you may remember, was the grandson of Ham, and it was Nimrod who founded this city on the banks of the Euphrates in the land of Shinar where people had congregated – the city that he called Babel. Babel originally meant "the gate of God." However, the God to whom Nimrod's City was the gateway was not the Creator God, but was Satan, the fallen archangel. Babel, in time, became known as Babylon, and it was the epitome of all political, civil, and religious rebellion against the authority, and against the Word of God.

Nimrod, in his seeking to remove the fear of God from people, created a religion of idol worship for mankind which made gods of the heavenly luminaries; of animals; of insects; and, of man himself. Idolatry was not a gradual development in the human race. Idolatry came full blown from the mind of Nimrod as a substitute for worshiping God. People didn't just gradually start worshiping idols. This was an immediate creation within a few generations after the flood had subsided.

**Abominations**

So, Nimrod deliberately created a religious system that was a counterfeit of Satan to oppose God. The religion of Babylon, as with all religion, created a series of rituals for the worship of their idol gods, and practices, which in fact were morally filthy, and which the Bible has described as abominations to God. We have taken the time to take you through the Bible to view a number of these abominations. Indeed, our hair stood on end as we have gone through this the last couple of sessions. You are enormously informed by having heard that compilation, because you realize now that what you heard then you see about you from the highest echelons of the American governments down to the garbage collectors that the abominations are being practiced. God says, "A society does these things is going to be destroyed by Me.

So, Nimrod, seeking to get people to overcome their fear of the Creator God, came up with a religion that he told people was just as good as the one that God wanted them to follow. But God, as you know, thwarted their international plans by breaking up the one language into many so that the societies they were building (the internationalism that they were holding together) was forced to break up, and people were forced to move out across the earth into their own language groups.

However, when they moved up the religion of Babylon that Nimrod had invented under the direction of Satan was taken with them everywhere. Babylon, therefore, is described for us in Revelation 17:5 as the Mother of Harlots, here referring to spiritual unfaithfulness to the Word of God, and of the abominations of the earth. These abominations that we looked at in Scripture were invented as part of the religion of Nimrod, and they are now practiced in various religions of the world.

**The Roman Catholic Church**

These religions of the world are Babylon's harlot daughters. One of the greatest expressions of Nimrod's religion today is the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic pope carries now the title that was once carried by the high priest of the Babylon religion: Pontifex Maximus, which means "the chief bridge-builder." In the ancient days, that Pontifex Maximus was a bridge builder between Satan and lost humanity. It is really the same thing with the pope, who is the bridge builder between Satan and his domain, and unsaved human beings. The doctrines and the practices of Babylonianism have been combining with Christianity, and they produced the mongrel religion that we know of today is the Roman Catholic Church, one of the harlot religions that is here in Revelation. Please don't make the mistake of saying that the Roman Catholic Church is the harlot religion being referred to here. That is not true. It is only one expression of the harlotry that came from Babylon.

Many of the Roman Catholic priests, from the things we have read you, you have seen, have been extremely vile personalities themselves, certainly not saved; certainly not born-again peopled; and, certainly not headed for heaven. Yet, they ruled this powerful religious system, this expression of Babylon.

There is, Revelation 17:5 tells us, a mystery, a secret aspect about this Babylon, the mother of false religion. The divine secret about Babylonianism is that in the era of the tribulation, it would become the dominant religion of the world. All mankind will be accepting and practicing a religion of idolatry. Ultimately, the idolatry will center on the antichrist. All of mankind is practicing the abominations that they have drunk from the cup of the harlot religion which has been extended to them.

The word "mystery" means "secret." The secret is the unbelievable depths of the rebellion against God, and the lawlessness to which all mankind will be led by the religion of Babylon. Just remember some of the things that we have already read earlier under some of the various judgments that are coming upon the tribulation world. What is the reaction of the people to their punishment? They're cursing God. They're saying filthy things against God. They're doing everything they can to thrust sin up into the face of God, and they blaspheme Him. That's their reaction. People are not that bad today. There is coming a time, and this was the secret, when the human race would descend to such depths of vileness and evil as to even outstrip what happened before the flood. All the abominations in Babylon are in some degree practiced by mankind today. But their highest expression, their most intense practice, is still ahead in the tribulation.

**The Mystery of Lawlessness**

So, please open to another mystery that we know what to look at in further detail because it's related to the mystery of Babylon. It expresses the secret of Babylon in greater detail. It's found in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, where it is described as the mystery of lawlessness, the secret of lawlessness. Here is the divine secret about the final condition that will characterize mankind in his religion of Babylon. This is the point of climax for Nimrod's Babel religion on the earth. It will be the climax of lawlessness, and it will take place during the tribulation era. The mystery of Babylon the Great and the mystery of lawlessness are two mysteries which have a frightful union in the Scripture. So, that's why we're going to take time to look at the mystery of lawlessness as the final description (the expression) of what is going to be the core of the mystery of Babylon.

The church in Thessalonica was a church that the apostle Paul had ministered to for about six weeks. It is amazing, from 1 and 2 Thessalonians, which are dealing with questions that arose out of his instruction, to see what it was that he taught them. He gave them an enormous course in prophecy. Some people sometimes say we don't need to study prophecy. Most churches don't. If you ever go to a church where they have the pews, and they provide Bibles that people use constantly (Bibles which have been used to any extent), you will find that the books of Daniel and Revelation are very clean pages. They don't deal with the great prophetic Scriptures. Yet, the apostle Paul spent six weeks, and gave them an intensive course in where history was moving from their time. They didn't know how long before Christ was to return.

Out of their experience of learning about the tribulation, and the great suffering that people were going to experience during that time, came a misconception because they were going through a living hell at the hands of the Jews; the antagonists of Christ; and, at the hands of the Roman government. So, they came up with a misconception about the rapture of the church, when the church is caught away to meet Christ in the air, and the tribulation period begins, and what is known in the Scripture as "the day of the Lord." "The day of the Lord" is a technical term. Paul had taught the Thessalonians Christians all about the day of the Lord. It is a time we find in Scripture when God would, in a way as never before, exercise is wrath on mankind. Then following the exercise of that wrath, He will bring a period of great blessing to suffering humanity and to believers. It's a combination of night and day: great suffering – that's the tribulation period, that's the beginning of the day of the Lord; and, great blessing – 1,000 years of the Millennial Kingdom.

So, from comparing Scripture with Scripture, which we will not certainly do extensively today, we find that the day of the Lord will begin after the rapture of the church – after the Christians have been removed from this earth to meet Christ in the air. So, all the world will be filled only with unbelievers. Then we'll follow that darkest period of human history known as the seven years of the tribulation, the final years of Daniel's 490-year timetable.

So, the day of the Lord is to be first a time of direct divine judgment, and then a time of blessing on mankind. Let's look at just a few verses to give you a little orientation to this. The Old Testament is replete with information about this technical period known as the day of the Lord. Isaiah 13:6: "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near. It will come as destruction from the Almighty."

Drop down to Isaiah 13:9: "Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation, and He will exterminate its sinners from it." That is a direct description of the seven-year tribulation period.

Please turn to Zephaniah 3:14-20: "'Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion. Shout in triumph, O Israel. Rejoice and exalt with all your heart, O, daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord has taken away his judgments against you. He has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst. You will fear disaster no more. In that day, it will be said to Jerusalem, 'Do not be afraid, O Zion. Do not let your hands fall limp. The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exalt over you with joy. He will be quiet in His love. He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy. I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feast. They came from you, O Zion. The reproach of exile is a burden on them. Behold, I'm going to deal at that time with all your oppressors. I will save the lame. I will gather the outcast. I will turn their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, even at that time when I gather you together. Indeed, I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before their eyes,' says the Lord."

Zephaniah 3:14-20 are a call for Israel to rejoice after what? After a time of great judgment. When God said, "I will set up the Jewish people so that all the world will respect them. They will have peace, and they will enjoy good fortune and the whole area of blessing. Well, the Jews have never had that. But this is the millennium that he's talking about, which comes immediately after the tribulation, and it is part of the day of the Lord.

There is one other verse to look at. Turn over to Joel 2:28-32. Joel says, "And it will come about after this. I will pour out My spirit on all mankind, and your sons and daughters will prophesy." He is speaking here of the happy part of the day of the Lord, the millennium: "Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants, I'll pour out My spirit in those days. And I will display wonders in the sky and on earth: blood; fire; and, columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness; the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord."

Her are things that take place in nature. We've been reading about those as the plagues of God. He's talking about that time which is the tribulation time. That's when the moon will be in blood. That's when the sun will not shine. We've found how it will be turned to darkness. It's the time of the awesome day of the Lord: "And it will come about that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be delivered; for on Mount Sinai and in Jerusalem, there will be those who escape, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors when the Lord calls."

What Joel is saying is that the day of the Lord is going to begin with terrible things – things that have never happened to the sun; to the moon; and, to the luminaries. But following this, God is going to preserve a remnant of saved Jews and gentiles, and they will go into His Millennial Kingdom. Verses 28-29 talk about how the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon people, and ecstatics will reign supreme. This will be an ecstatic condition among the people of God that will be a controlled ecstatic because the King Jesus will be there to see that it doesn't drift off into a satanic delusion as aesthetics have done today under the charismatic movement.

It is this passage that Peter was referring to on the day of Pentecost when he said, "What you have seen happening here, in these people speaking in the ecstasy of foreign languages that you have understood from your various countries, is a sample (a preview) like that which God described in Joel, which will take place in the Millennial Kingdom.

So, first of all, the day of the Lord has to be technically defined. If you follow the Scriptures through the Bible, you will discover that this is the consistent picture. It is a twofold combination: a period of night in darkness and suffering; and, a period of great joy. There will be a period of tribulation, and a period of the Millennial Kingdom. It begins with the rapture of the church, and it ends with a cleansing of the heavens and the earth at the end of the millennium when He produces a new heaven and a new earth. Got it? The day of the Lord begins when the church has been removed (at the rapture of the church). It ends at the end of the millennium when there's a new heaven and a new earth produced by God.

So, obviously, your logic has already told you that the day of the Lord cannot begin until the Christians are gone. The day of the Lord cannot begin until after the rapture of the church. That was the problem in Thessalonica. The Christians there said, "You know what? We're in the day of the Lord. This suffering we're having, and these terrible things – this is exactly what Paul told us was going to happen in the day of the Lord (in the suffering part of that period). We missed the rapture." That's where they sent messengers to say, "Paul, what has happened? How did this happen to us?"

1 Thessalonians 5:2 reminds us of something that the Thessalonians knew – that the day of the Lord is going to come upon mankind unexpectedly. 1 Thessalonians 5:2: "For you yourselves know full well," Paul says, "that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. It's going to come unexpectedly – suddenly." So, the Thessalonians were going through persecution and suffering and calamities that had been associated with the suffering of the day of the Lord.

What made it worse was that some false teachers had come to Thessalonica. There are always some false teachers following the true teachers, and they had set themselves up as teachers in the churches in the city of Thessalonica. They taught the people that they were suffering because they were in the day of the Lord. There were some Bible teachers who said, "The rapture has passed, and some of us have not been taken, and we are suffering now in the day of the Lord.

**Pre-Tribulation Rapture**

The Thessalonians were very confused, because they had listened attentively to Paul' instructions, which had taught them that they would never experience the suffering of the tribulation, but that they would be removed previously at the rapture of the church. Paul taught them what we call a pre-tribulation rapture. You go to heaven as Christians before the tribulation is turned loose on this earth.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, "And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead (that is Jesus), who delivers us from the tribulation to come." He delivers us from the wrath to come. Boy, that's pretty clear. That's what Paul told them: wait for Christ to return. To do what? To take you to heaven in the rapture. This Jesus is going to come and save you from going into the tribulation.

Notice 1 Thessalonians 5:9: "For God has not destined us for wrath (for tribulation), but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." There you have it again. It is not the will of God to put you as a Christian through this horrible period of human history, the seven years of the tribulation. There's a very popular Jewish leader who has written a book called The Pre-Wrath Rapture. I'm not going to go into it. You may have heard of it. I only want to mention it to you. But he has missed the boat. He has decided to shift the position of where the day of the Lord begins, and he has come up with the fact that Christians are going to go through most of the tribulation. This has been an old hack, an old story, that people have constantly come up with of how Christians are going to have to suffer in the tribulation. But I think you can see from these two verses alone that Paul very clearly told them that that is not what's going to happen to him.

Well, these misconceptions got back to Paul, so he sat down and wrote 2 Thessalonians to try to straighten it out. So, now we come back to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-6, where he proceeds to straighten out this issue of the day of the Lord. And in the process, he teaches us about the secret of lawlessness which is going to be associated with that period, because it will be the climax of the religion of Babylon. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-6 are an explanation of the secret of lawlessness:

"Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (in the rapture), and our gathering together to Him." Paul introduces immediately the subject of the rapture of the church which he had taught in detail to the Thessalonian Christians. They knew immediately what he was talking about.

Verse 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." He told the Christians in Thessalonica not to be upset in thinking that the day of the Lord had arrived, and that they were in it. He immediately says, "That's not true. The day of the Lord has not arrived, and you are not in it. He warned against them believing the scuttlebutt that was coming to them from people who were claiming information by a spirit (prophecy), or a sermon (a message of some itinerant preacher who came through), or even somebody who had written a forged letter (a false letter), and signed Paul's name to it: "Or as if a letter from us had come to the effect that the day of the Lord is upon us."

Well, you can understand why these poor Christians in Thessalonica were confused. They understood what Paul that taught them. And all of a sudden, here they have this pompous preacher that comes by; he eats chicken on Sunday; he is very mellifluous in his voice; people are impressed with him; and, he tells them, "We're in the day of the Lord, brethren." Somebody says, "I've just received a prophecy from God, and He has told me that we're in the day of the Lord. In comes the morning mail, and here's a letter from Paul, and it says, "Brethren, we're in the day of the Lord. Button the hatches, and get yourselves ready for the worst." None of that was true.

It was true that the Thessalonians were going through a lot of suffering, but they were not the sufferings of the day of the Lord. In verses 3-6, Paul warns the Thessalonian Christians not to be gullible in believing the teachings of someone passing through who appears impressive, and claims divine authority. The only way that the Bereans of old preserved themselves in their spiritual integrity was that they were not gullible. They checked what they were told against Scripture.

So, what's the antidote to some forceful speaker? There's only one antidote to false doctrine. There's only one antidote to a striking personality who has a way with words. That is the knowledge of doctrine and the inordinate ignorance of Bible doctrine today causes many sincere people to be easily shaken by the religious deceivers.

So, Paul says, "I'm going to make it simple for you. There are three things that have to happen before the day of the Lord can begin. If you haven't seen these three things happen, then you know you're not in the day of the Lord. You're suffering, and it's going to get worse, but it's not because you have missed the rapture."

**Apostasy**

Verse 3: "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come (the day of the Lord) unless the apostasy comes first." The first thing that has to happen is a widespread apostasy – an all-time great falling away by the professing church from the Word of God. Now that falling away always begins when you abandon the principle of the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. That does exist today. This is widespread among Christian groups. It is widely taught in seminaries and Bible schools that the Bible contains mistakes. The inerrancy of Scripture has been abandoned.

What began on the West Coast in Fuller Seminary as a tremendous school of God, produced by Charles Fuller of the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour – that school gradually (the professors secretly) began to have doubts about the inerrancy of Scripture, as new professors were brought on after the original five powerful men. Harold Lindsell was one of the five powerful originals. He has written two books. One is called The Battle for the Bible, that step-by-step delineates what happened before his very eyes as the authorities of the seminary tolerated more and more compromise with the truthfulness of the Scriptures, until Fuller Seminary now has become a nothing school in terms of its impact. It has great impact in the religious world, but as a place where a young man can go and learn truth, it has lost its capacity.

One young lady speaking to me recently told me how the classes at Fuller Seminary are sometimes overwhelmingly filled with women who are now being trained to be pastors, and to go into very into that kind of ministry. It is a school that has lost its way because it tolerated professors who compromised on the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. They said, "God's omnipotence fell short of preserving for us a Bible that is truth."

Well, that is apostasy, but it's not yet the apostasy of the end times. The Bible still bears respect. The Bible still is not being spit upon by American society, for example, in general, by the Western world. The pages of the Bible aren't being torn out and used in vulgar, contemptuous, hideous, humiliating ways to show contempt for the Word of God. The Bible still carries an impact.

So, we don't have this kind of a widespread falling away from the truth. When it happens, it will be awe-inspiring. That's why John says Revelation 17:6 that he was amazed with a great amazement. What was he amazed about? He couldn't believe that the church that he was part of was going to degenerate into such a wholesale apostate condition?

**The Antichrist**

The second thing that verse 3 says is, "And the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction." The second thing that has to happen is that you have to know who the antichrist is. Do you know who the antichrist is? No, we don't. He's called the man of lawlessness because that's the characteristic of the antichrist. He breaks all the rules. He is breaking especially the rules of God. The antichrist will be identified at some point in history. I suspect he's alive today. I suspect he's coming on the scene in a very sophisticated way, but that he's not widely known. He moves in a certain circle. He carries a certain weight within that circle. One day he's going to be cast upon the world scene. He will be recognized, for one thing (by those who know anything about the Word of God) by the fact that he will be an extremely lawless person. He will be in rebellion against all the rules of God. For that reason, he is described as the "son of destruction." In the King James Bible, he was described as the "son of perdition," which means that he's headed for the lake of fire. He's going to be destroyed in the lake of fire.

Verse 4 shows that the antichrist is going to be a bitter adversary of God. We don't have anybody on the scene nationally who is saying foul things about God. I mean, this is going to be on public nightly television – the grossest, most despicable, filthy, vile, vulgar comments about God that this man will be making, because he is an adversary of God, and he's totally lawless.

So, verse 4 says, "Who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship," because he wants to be the object of worship: "So that he takes his seat in the temple of God (that is, in the renewed (the rebuilt) temple of the Jews in Jerusalem), displaying himself as being God." Daniel told us that he was going to do that. He seeks to replace the worship of whatever gods people worship with the worship of himself. But above all, he wants to get people to stop worshiping the true God. The antichrist is going to set himself up in the holy of holies in that temple, which the Jews will begin shortly rebuilding in Jerusalem. He will set his image up there as the object of their worship. This will be in the great tribulation. The term "great tribulation," remember, refers to the last three-and-a-half years of the tribulation.

So, the antichrist will tell the whole world that he is God, and he will demand that they respect him as such and worship him. We are told in Revelation 13 that anybody who won't do that, the false prophet will put to death. Such a person had not arrived in the time of the Thessalonians, and he has not arrived to our day.

So, we have two things that have not come about. There's not a wholesale, complete, degenerate apostasy in the world from the Word of God, and the authority of God. Secondly, there is no man such as this on the public scene that is known. He's there, probably. But until he comes to where he is identifiable, you can't have the day of the Lord.

In verse 5 Paul says, "Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?" Paul's review here about the day of the Lord is nothing new to these people. He had personally taught them this doctrine. He was an apostle with direct revelation from God, so his teaching carried authority. These deep things of prophecy had been taught to the new Christians at Thessalonica. Do you see how far a Christian who is positive to the Word of God can go? This is deep stuff, and these Christians had no problem understanding it. They had a problem now relating it to their own circumstances.

How long is this going to go on? Verse 6: "And you know what restrains him now so that in his time he may be revealed." Something in the day of the Thessalonians was restraining the full outburst of evil, and it was restraining the appearance of the antichrist. Something or someone capable of doing so is preventing the premature revelation of the antichrist today. And that someone or something is preventing the full outburst of evil today. Apostasy is not where it's going to go. The restraint on the historical culmination of the expression of evil from the old sin nature; from Satan; and, the world system is being held back. Such a restrainer on human evil had not been removed from the earth in the Thessalonians' day, nor in our day.

**The Removal of Restraint upon Evil**

So, Paul says that the third thing that has to happen before the day of the Lord comes is that whoever or whatever is restraining the full outburst of evil on this earth has to be removed from that role of restraint. So, you don't have full worldwide apostasy; you don't have the identification of the antichrist; and, you don't have the removal of the restraint upon evil from the sin nature, Satan, and the world – the three sources of evil.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12, Paul explains now the mystery of lawlessness. In verse 7, Paul says, "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way." Here's the divine secret of the future time in human history, when the old sin nature evil of man will run totally amuck and unrestrained in its expression on the earth. The mystery of lawlessness (that total abandonment to evil was to some degree already going on in the day of the Thessalonians Christians. Obviously, that was characteristic of the Roman Empire. But God, at some point, is going to step aside and remove the restraint that is on evil so that Satan's designs can be carried out without any limitations. It will create a society which is worse than that which was before the flood. The secret power of lawlessness was at work in the Thessalonians' day, but it was being held back from its full expression.

The question is: who or what, to our very day, is restraining lawlessness in this world. Was it the Roman Empire? Hardly. That was the promoter of lawlessness and evil. Was it Satan? No, he's a promoter of evil. He wants to be set loose. Was it human government? Human government cannot restrain evil. None of these are capable of doing that. There's only one who is capable of restraining evil in this world dominated by Satan, who is the god of this world, and that is God Himself – specifically God the Holy Spirit.

**The Restrainer is God the Holy Spirit**

Remember that in this room at this point, God the Holy Spirit personally indwells every believer. So, there's a difference between His presence and His omnipresence. He is present on this earth in every believer whose body he indwells as his temple. This is why we soberly consider what we do with our physical bodies; our minds; and, the parts of our bodies, in terms of using them in sinful ways, because we are using that in the presence of the Spirit of God who indwells us. It is God the Holy Spirit who is the only one who is capable of restraining evil on the face of this earth. And He does it through the Christians whom He indwells. Biblical Christians have always held back the tide of moral lawlessness by their presence in society. Christians led by the Holy Spirit are sounding the alarm against moral, social, economic, religious, and political liberals. It is the Christians (specifically, the biblical Christians, which are called fundamentalists, because they believe in the fundamentals of Scripture). They are the ones that the Holy Spirit, by and large, uses to restrain evil.

How long is He going to do this? Can you figure it out? The Holy Spirit is going to restrain evil to a certain point. Then that third factor (that third requirement) for the day of the Lord to click into operation will be achieved – the removal of the restraint upon evil. When will the Holy Spirit stop restraining evil? He will restrain it until He Himself is removed in His presence from this earth. When will that happen? It will happen at the rapture of the church. When the church is taken up to meet Christ in the air, the Holy Spirit's presence on this earth goes with them. He does remain here in His omnipresence, but in His presence directly, He moves away with the church. The Holy Spirit indwells the body of Christ, the church. He is present now on this earth. When the church is removed, He goes with it, and His presence of omnipresence remains, but He Himself, in His direct impact, is no longer here.

With the church gone to heaven, there's not going to be anybody through whom the Holy Spirit can exercise the restraining ministry on evil. So, obviously, the restrainer has to be removed before the day of the Lord, so that the evil in the tribulation period may come to its climax. And that's an evidence for pre-tribulation rapture of the church. The church has to go before the tribulation so that the Holy Spirit is removed from restraining the evil (the lawlessness) that's going to come to a climax in the tribulation. As long as the church is around, you can't have the secret condition of lawlessness come about.

Paul point is, since in the Thessalonians' day, the Holy Spirit was still restraining evil, the rapture had not taken place. They hadn't missed it, and they were not in the day of the Lord. That certainly is true to this very day.

In verse 8 Paul says, "And then that lawless one." He is now speaking about the antichrist. It was at that time when the Holy Spirit is removed: "Then is when that lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming." With the restraint of the Holy Spirit on evil terminated, the antichrist is going to be identifiable. He will rush headlong and uninhibited into leading mankind into the full expression of the religion of Babylon, and into the depths of moral vileness and abominations. This lawless one is the same man who is referred to in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Daniel 9:26-27, and Daniel 11:36 through 12:1. All those passages speak about this kind of lawless person who is going to come on the scene of human history.

The power by which antichrist draws people into his evil is the power, of course, of Satan. At the appearance of Jesus Christ, meaning His Second Coming, the Lord will terminate this human being, the antichrist, by simply blowing him over by a fiery blast from the mouth of Christ. The antichrist with Satan's power is nothing but a cream puff against the power of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the antichrist hates and degrades.

So, the lawless one will be killed, and his political and religious empire destroyed. Verse 8 spans the entire seven-year career of the antichrist, from the beginning of the tribulation to his overthrow at the end of the tribulation at the Second Coming of Christ. The whole 8th verse: "And then that last one will be revealed." He comes on the scene seven years later: "Whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to an end at the Second Coming of Christ."

Verse 9 tells us how a man can do such a thing – how a man in the human race, in our sophisticated age, could become so powerful. This is the power base of the lawless one: "That is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonder." The antichrist is empowered by Satan who has great power. And he follows Satan's modus operandi of counterfeiting the works of God. He performs supernatural expressions.

**Power**

Here they are: First of all, there is "power." This is inherent power that Satan places at his disposal. It is great power to be able to do things. It's like you wish you could have the capacity to bring somebody down that's an agent of evil – that you could just look at somebody, and drill a hole through his heart, and stop this agent of evil – that you had power that you could exercise that way. Well, of course, that's the power of a deity. Satan has limited power, but he's placed that at the disposal of this antichrist. But the antichrist *will* do that. The antichrist will probably be able to just look at people and make them drop dead. The antichrist will have an inherent capacity that is far beyond anything that human beings can do. It will be a super-human power that Satan gives him.

**Miracles**

Secondly, he will demonstrate to people and convince them by signs. This is the word for miracles. He's going to convince mankind that he is really God because of the miracles that he can produce. The charismatics today, who perhaps do have some miraculous production, never have learned this lesson – who it is that's giving them the miracles.

**False Wonders**

The third thing is false wonders to confirm that he is God. This is a sense of awe by giving people the impression that God is working. People will be awed in the presence of the antichrist by what they see him do. They will feel that they are in the presence of deity. Satan is doing the same kind of thing in the counterfeit charismatic movement today, through their leaders, deceiving their followers with power and signs and false wonders.

It is interesting that these same three words that are used here to describe the working of the antichrist, are used to describe the working of Jesus Christ in Acts 2:22. There, you will find these same three words to describe what Christ did. And you will find them in Hebrews 2:4 applied to the apostles – these agents of the true God. Satan is always the counterfeiter, and he puts his own man up there to do the same three things.

In verse 10, here is the total deception of unbelievers by the antichrist: "And with all deception of wickedness for those who perish." This is the deception of the unbelievers. Believers aren't going to be tricked. But unbelievers will be, because why? Why will the average person, with a good IQ, be deceived? Because he did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. Unbelievers are perishing because they're on the way to the lake of fire. Unbelievers are easily deceived because they reject the truth of God, starting with the truth of the gospel. They like to talk about love, but there is no love without truth.

In the Christian Anticommunism Crusade newsletter from Dr. Schwartz, somebody had written him and said, "Don't send me your newsletter anymore, with all of your lies against the homosexuals. You are not acting in love." And Schwartz had an interesting phrase. He said, "Let me speak to you about that which is the handmaiden of love: truth. Let me tell you some truth about the homosexuals." It's amazing how people who like to talk about love can detach it from truth.

That's what these people are going to do. They did not believe the truth of God, but, boy, are they were going to talk about love in the tribulation? Those who reject the Bible and its doctrines will be easily deceived, because the antichrist will appeal to their emotions and experiences, and that is not going to lead them to the truth.

In verse 11, God makes a judgment. He hands over people to believing false doctrine. And I want to tell you something. This is a sobering verse because he'll do this to you and me. God does this every day of the week. This happens when a Christian comes to the point where he is negative to the truth. And, boy, this is a terrible place to attend. This is one church you don't want to attend if you don't want to come under the condemnation of this verse 11. This is one place you want to stay away from you. If you arch your back against God and buck His truth, He then switches gears, and He drops a film over your eyes so that you are receptive to every lie that the sin nature spews up in anything that comes from your fallen sinful mentality. For this reason, that they did not love the truth of doctrine, God will send upon them a diluting influence so that they might believe what is false.

1 Timothy 2:4-6 tell us that God wants everybody to exercise positive volition toward the gospel. But God allows those who continue to reject the gospel to come to great mental delusion so that they cannot grasp the gospel, and they go out unsaved. This is what's going to come across the people of the tribulation who have not accepted the truth of God. They will accept the lies of the antichrist. They will believe the falsehood that the antichrist is deity. They'll be totally out of touch with reality.

So, we conclude with verse 12: God's purpose is justice. Why does God do this – to allow a person to drift off into believing falsehood, including you Christians? "In order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." Unbelievers who are negative to doctrine are allowed by God to believe the lie of the antichrist – that he is God. Rejection of God's truth is the basis for God's justice in punishing the followers of the antichrist and their lawlessness. It's right for Him to punish them because they were told that the lawlessness is wrong. The spirit of lawlessness is going to so permeate society that few are going to be around to listen to God, let alone to be saved. Not only did the unsaved here not believe God's Word of Truth, but we're also told that they took a great pleasure in thumbing their nose at God by doing every vile and wicked thing that they could think of.

The powerful delusion that God will bring upon lawless ones probably applies in a special way to a question that some of you like to ask sometimes: If a person hears the gospel now; he rejects it; the rapture takes place; the Christians are removed; and, the day of the Lord begins, can that person be saved? There may be strong evidence that those who have rejected the truth will be left in such delusion that they won't even be able to believe the gospel after the rapture takes place, and they see the things happening before their very eyes. Not to be able to believe the truth is a horrendous judgment of God.

This passage that we have looked at in this session should make it very clear that we play a very dangerous game when we learn the truth, and then refuse to believe it and act upon it. You can become a spiritual casualty. Is it worth it? I think not.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1993

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