

# Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

November 07, 2021

## I. Introduction

- A. **2 Thessalonians 2:7-12** . . . 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] Then 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; [9] that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, [10] and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. [11] For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, [12] in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.
- B. It has been two weeks since we talked about **vs 7**, so I want to remind you that though the man of lawlessness is being restrained and therefore not currently active in our world, the mystery of lawlessness is already active.
1. Therefore, it is our responsibility as God's people to encourage each other to remain humbly obedient to God, to continue living according to God's word, and to resist the ungodly mindset and worldly influences of those outside the church and inside the church so that we are not led astray.
  2. As the writer of **Hebrews 10:23-25** says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; [24] and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [25] not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

## C. Pray

## II. The man of lawlessness and those who follow him

- A. [8] Once the one who restrains the man of lawlessness is taken out of the way, **then** that lawless one will be revealed, and he will have his way for a time. His exercise of authority will include demonstrations of power, miracles, and deceptive wonders to give credence to his claim of being divine and to gain the support of the people. Yet in spite of his claims and demonstrations, our returning King, the Lord Jesus Christ,

will overthrow him, break his power, slay him with the breath of His mouth, and bring an end to both the influence of lawlessness and those who practice lawlessness as a way of life.

1. In other words, the return of Christ will not only take believers upward – into God’s eternal kingdom, it will bring lawlessness, and the influence of lawlessness, and the practice of lawlessness to an end. And it will forever remove those who have chosen lawlessness as a way of life over humble submission and obedience to God.
2. Which raises the question, why is destroying lawlessness and every trace of its existence such an important part of Christ’s return? I believe it is important because for there to be an eternal kingdom without sin or evil or selfishness or ungodliness or injustice of any kind, lawlessness must either be utterly destroyed or eternally confined so it cannot enter God’s eternal realm.
3. One of God’s mysteries is the origin of sin or lawlessness.
  - a. Though we don’t know its origin, it seems that lawlessness entered the heart Lucifer when he wanted to exalt himself to a position that would make him equal to God (**Isaiah 14:13-14**).
  - b. And we know that lawlessness entered our world when Adam and Eve chose to break God’s law and eat the forbidden fruit in hopes of knowing as God knows (**Genesis 3:1-6**).
  - c. And Isaiah spoke of the universal practice of lawlessness in **Isaiah 53:6**, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”
4. We only have to examine history and present day life to see that lawlessness is a heinous, destructive evil that continues to increase.
  - a. If we look carefully, we can see its destructive effects on morality, integrity, marriage, families, children, women and girls, communities, cities, governments, tribes, nations, and even the church.
  - b. One example of the evil and destructiveness of lawlessness is what happened at the door of Lot’s home when the two angels came to urge him to leave Sodom.
  - c. The dark of night arrest, false accusations, torture, and unjust crucifixion of Jesus is another example of the evil and destructiveness of lawlessness.
  - d. And the worldwide degradation, mistreatment, and sexual abuse of women and girls is an undeniable example of the evil and destructiveness of lawlessness.

- e. These are but a few reasons why lawlessness – in all its forms – must be destroyed.
  - 5. And yet, who of us has not chosen one or more forms of lawlessness to get our own way or protect our own interests or pass a test or hide our sin or exert power over others or accumulate riches or take what doesn't belong to us or make ourselves look better than we are?
  - 6. The sad reality is, we see the evil of lawlessness. We disapprove of it and even despise it in others. Yet when it serves our purpose, we choose it over humble submission and obedience to God. And though we may never choose lawlessness in its more heinous or cruel forms, we have chosen it nonetheless.
  - 7. This fact alone is why lawlessness in all its forms must be destroyed. And thankfully it will be destroyed at the return of Christ.
- B. [9] that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders . . .
- 1. When the man of lawlessness appears and exerts his power over all the earth, his coming will be in agreement with or by the power and authority of Satan. The proof of this will be in his display of power, signs, and wonders – though they will be as fake and false as every lie and trick of Satan has been or ever will be.
  - 2. However, we should not be surprised that the devil is actively and intricately involved in the presence, intentions, and activities of the man of lawlessness, just as he is in the mystery of lawlessness today.
    - a. The reality is, Satan is the deceptive force behind all the misleading and false teachings surrounding the return of Christ.
    - b. Jesus inferred as much in **Matthew 24:24**, “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.”
    - c. And we know from other portions of God's word that the devil's only intention is to steal, kill, and destroy, that he has been a murderer from the beginning, that he has sinned from the beginning, that he is a liar, that he is the father of lies, that he does not and in fact cannot stand for the truth because there is no truth in him, and that by his nature he is evil.
  - 3. An example of Satan's great deceptions is the lie that we will have a better life than God offers by being self-serving, proud, greedy – or in other words, ungodly. And with this lie, Satan has to be deceptive about his deception, because he has to blind us to the fact that a self-serving, proud, greedy, ungodly life will result in eternal separation

from God and eternal damnation in the lake of fire, which is the second death.

4. To grasp how evil Satan is, ponder for a moment how many people he has deceived into turning against God and going to hell with him. Then ask yourself, for whose sake is he doing this?
- C. [10] and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.
1. The point here is that the man of lawlessness will use every kind of deception and scheme available – including calling evil good – in order to accomplish his wicked intentions. And one of his evil intentions is to get as many people as possible to follow him, even though it means following him into eternal damnation.
  2. Now it is true that the devil, the man of lawlessness, and those who work with them have power and abilities that they can use to influence us to follow them. However, they cannot overpower us – though it may feel that way sometimes. Their power and abilities are only effective in the lives of those who do not love the truth – that is, those who do not want God and the truth of God’s word.
  3. Even within the Christian community, the devil, the man of lawlessness, cult leaders, false teachers and self-serving church leaders gain the majority of their followers from among those who have a serious distrust of God, or who are disappointed with or have been hurt by Christians, or who are leading a double life because they want the world’s ways and God’s ways.
  4. Therefore, to protect yourself from the devil’s influence and the influence of his workers here on earth, guard against any desire or pursuit or mindset that pushes God aside or makes Him less important than something else. And do not willfully or repeatedly involve yourself in any behavior that is contrary to God’s word.
  5. Remember, God has given you everything you need to live a godly life. He promises to protect you from temptations stronger than you can resist. And He says that if you submit to Him, resist the devil, and draw near to Him, He will draw near to you.
- D. [11] For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, [12] in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.
1. From the time of Adam and Eve, a vast majority of the world’s population have rejected and even despised the truth, preferring a life of lawlessness built on deception and lies.

2. God has responded to this universal rejection of Himself and lawless living in various ways. For example:
  - a. He responded to Adam and Eve by putting them out of the Garden of Eden.
  - b. In the days of Noah, He responded with a flood.
  - c. To the lawlessness of Sodom and Gomorrah, God responded by destroying them with fire and brimstone from heaven.
  - d. In the days of Moses, God responded to the Israelites distrust of Him and resulting lawlessness by making them wander in the wilderness until the generation of lawless Israelites died.
  - e. During the time of the prophets and Jesus' life on earth, God dealt with those who continued to reject Him and live a lawless life by eventually hardening their heart, dulling their ears, and blinding their eyes so that it was harder for them to come to repentance. And God will do the same during the end times.
3. We see the truth of this in the next part of **vs 11 – God will send upon them a deluding influence** –
  - a. Though we may not fully understand why God makes it harder for some people to repent and turn to Him, I believe the Bible gives us some information about this.
  - b. For example, just before sending Moses to Egypt to free the Israelites, God said He would harden Pharaoh's heart so that Pharaoh would not let the people go (**Exodus 4:21**).
    - (1) God explained in **Exodus 7:2-5**, that He would harden Pharaoh's heart in order to multiply His signs and wonders. And He wanted to multiply His signs and wonders for two reasons: (1) to punish the Egyptians for mistreating the Israelites, and (2) to show them who the true God is.
    - (2) However, Pharaoh hardened his own heart in response to the first five plagues (*snakes, water turned to blood, frogs, insects, cattle die*) and the seventh plague (*hail*).
    - (3) It wasn't until the sixth (*boils*), eighth (*locusts*), ninth (*darkness*), and tenth plague (*first born dies*) that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. And when actually doing this, He added a third reason – which was to have the Israelites' children and grandchildren hear these stories so they would know that Jehovah is the Lord (**Exodus 10:1-2**).
    - (4) The point is, God did not harden Pharaoh's heart to prevent him from repenting and doing God's will, but to punish Egypt for their genocide of Israeli boys, for their cruel enslavement

of the Israelites, and to give current and future generations of Israelites and Egyptians a view of God that would encourage them believe in God and live accordingly.

- c. A second OT example of God making it harder for sinners to come to repentance is found in **Isaiah 6:9-12**. In this passage God begins by telling the Israelites to continue listening and working at understanding what He says.
    - (1) However, God also said He was going to harden their hearts, dull their ears, and dim their eyes to the truth in order to make it harder for them to hear and discern the true intention or significance of what was said.
    - (2) And why would God do this? Because they had willfully and unrepentantly lived in sin for so long – even though God had tried various ways to get their attention – that now it was time for judgment. And though God is exceedingly merciful, He wanted to experience the judgment they had brought upon themselves.
    - (3) Think about it this way: if God hadn't made it harder for them to repent, then just as the blow of punishment was about to strike, they could repent and escape their doom – which would send the message that they (*and every other sinner*) could get away with a life of sin by repenting just before God's judgments begin.
  - d. God did a similar thing during the ministry of Jesus. We read in **Matthew 13:10-16** that Jesus spoke in parables because for years prior the Jews had been hardening their hearts, dulling their ears, and blinding their eyes to the truth. Therefore, by speaking in parables, Jesus made it harder for them to repent so that the insincere, the careless, and the self-serving would experience God's judgment for their years of willful, unrepentant sinfulness.
- 4. We see the same reasoning here in **2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**. Prior to Christ's return, God will send a deluding influence so that those who have repeatedly and willfully chosen to live according to the devil's lies, the world's deceptions, and the spirit of lawlessness will be inclined to continue doing so and therefore experience the justice and judgment of God due them.
  - 5. Does this mean sinners cannot repent and turn to God just prior to Christ's return? No. They can repent, right up to the last minute. But because God will make it harder for them to repent, it is

probable only those will repent who genuinely see the evil of their lawlessness and sincerely want to be reconciled to God and submit to His will.

6. To help add clarity to what I have just said, answer this question: When do you turn towards God and pray most fervently, when times are good or when times are bad, when you are healthy or when you are sick, when you know you need to grow spiritually or when you want relief from trouble or sickness?
7. If we, God's people, tend to use Him, what will unbelievers and insincere Christians do prior to Christ's return when there will be a time of tribulation worse than any that has occurred on the earth?

### III. Conclusion

- A. If God's purpose in creating us and then saving us is to enter into an eternal and intimate relationships with Him built on mutual love and trust, then it makes sense that God would make it harder for those who have chosen a life of lawlessness to repent just as judgment comes, for it is in this way that God separates the sincere from the insincere so that the sincere gain the relationship with Him they seek, and the insincere experience the judgment they brought upon themselves.