

## CALMNESS IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS

2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

Objective: To avoid being tossed around by every wind of doctrine regarding the Day of the Lord.

How many of you remember Y2K? Did any of you buy extra gasoline, canned goods, bottled water, generator, etc. to be prepared for the failure of the world? Talk about a hyped-up farce! I remember that we even had a meeting at church to talk about what people ought to do and how the church should be prepared to help when everything stopped working. That's sort of embarrassing! We look back on it now and can see the humor of how people can get "all shook up" and worried over an idea of what might happen.

Have you ever taken someone's name and used numerology to check to see if the person name turned out to be 666? How many people have you heard someone question or speculate that a particular person might turn out to be the antichrist? Have you ever wondered if the mark of the beast was a tattoo or maybe a computer chip implanted in your hand or forehead? Has the thought ever crossed your mind that the rapture has occurred and you missed it?

This is somewhat like the situation that the church at Thessalonica was facing shortly after Paul and Silas had been there help them get started. Paul and Silas left due to threats on their lives and sent Timothy to work with the Christian there. By the time Paul wrote the second letter to this church, he and Silas had move from Athens to Corinth and Timothy had joined them there.

There was a lot interest in the return of Christ and Paul had addressed some questions in the first letter and then addressed additional questions that came about from erroneous teachings that gotten into the church regarding the return of Christ. This second chapter of the second letter can be divided into three subheading of Dealing with Deception, Remembering the Truth, and Sticking with the Game Plan.

### **Dealing with Deception:**

<sup>1</sup> Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, <sup>2</sup> that you 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. <sup>3</sup> Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness (literally, sin) is revealed, the son of destruction, <sup>4</sup> 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. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 (NASB95)

Basically, some in the church had heard someone claim that all the problems and persecutions they were having was proof or evidence that they were in the midst of the "Day of the Lord." Paul had taught them that they would miss the coming wrath of God that was associated with the Day of the Lord and His judgment on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. It was likely that the means of missing the coming wrath was thought to be by way of the rapture of the church. The fact of the matter was the problems they were having were coming from people who were opposed to God rather than God's retribution on those who were persecuting His people. This is a basic difference in "tribulation" and the "wrath of God." They were mistaking the tribulation of persecution as being the wrath or anger of God.

Paul cautioned them to not be deceived by any teaching that does not agree with what he had already shared with them. Several things had to happen before the "Day of the Lord" would

occur.

The **first thing** is that “apostasy” or rebellion or falling away would have to happen. In the strictest sense, apostasy is a formal declaration of abandoning a previous commitment. It is very close to the idea of divorce. If you trace the Greek word origins back you find that some of the root words could mean “depart from.” Some have speculated that Paul was referring to the rapture (in which the church would depart from the earth) as opposed to a “rebellion” against righteousness having to happen before the Day of the Lord would come. That is a pretty big range of possible meanings. Not many commentators take this idea seriously that Paul meant the rapture in this case. Most focus on the “falling away” or rebellion idea. However, there is some variations as to what or who is involved. Some argue that the rebellion is by the unbelievers who start resisting all authority. Others think that it applies to an abandonment of faith by many in the church. The reasons are interesting for the two possibilities. Those who think this is applicable to the church make the argument that you can’t “divorce” what you haven’t been married to. You can’t fall away from a place where you have never been. On the other hand, those who say this does NOT apply to the church make the argument that Christians cannot fall away and abandon their faith because of “once saved, always saved.” So, where does that leave us? We can’t even agree on the first item that has to happen before the Day of the Lord.

Let’s look at the **second thing** that must happen and see if we can find some point of agreement. The “man of sin” must first be revealed before the Day of the Lord comes. What are some of the things we should look for to identify this “man of sin?”

Opposes and Exalts Himself Above All Deity and Religion:

Takes God’s Seat in the Temple of God:

Declares Himself to Be God:

There are several options that are thought to be possibilities as to “who” does or could meet these criteria.

One of the more popular ideas is that this is one individual and is the same as the anti-Christ mentioned in the letters from John. It has been thought to a Roman general who helped oversee the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. Other have some “superman” who will be a great world leader and head a coalition of European nations who eventually would make a deal with Israel at some time in the future when the temple will be rebuilt. Some have thought it was Simon Magnus a sorcerer, and who gave out himself to be some great one, and was called the great power of God, claimed that he was God, the Father in Samaria, the Son in Judea, and the Spirit in the rest of the nations of the world; and, because of his signs and lying wonders, had a statue erected by the Roman emperor with this inscription, "to Simon the holy god." The Roman Catholic Church had taught that this person would be a certain Jew who was to be begotten of Satan of a virgin of the tribe of Dan and would reign three and a half years and would then be destroyed by Christ.

Several hundred years ago many thought this description was in reference to a group of people more specifically a series of people who did the three things described above.

Specifically, it was thought to be the whole hierarchy of Rome: monks, friars, priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and especially popes. The following is a quote from Jamison, Faust and Brown commentary:

Doubtless “the apostasy” of Romanism is one of the greatest instances of the working of the mystery of iniquity, and its blasphemous claims for the Pope are forerunners of the final concentration of blasphemy in the man of sin, who shall not merely, as the Pope, usurp God’s honor as vicegerent of God, but oppose God openly at last?

In the present time, we have seen a general rise of lawlessness among all people. Whether we are seeing the “man of lawlessness” or the “lawlessness of man” is debatable. We

see a turning away from godliness in all parts of the world and even in our “Christian” culture. This has been going on for decades. This has been assisted and driven by secular humanists who are attempting to remove all practices and references related to God (especially any references to Jesus Christ) and organized religion from our culture. The official position of humanist is as follows:

Sovereignty resides in the individual. No human, natural, or supernatural power has any legal rights or powers over man. Man is his own lord, his own god, determines his own laws and decides morality.

The ultimate in humanism is the exaltation of man to a position rightly belonging to God. Some have related humanistic influence (imprint or mark) on our world (including some in the church) as the mark of the beast. The argument that is put forth is that the number seven is a number of perfection and represents completeness while the number six is representative of man’s effort (six day’s shall you work) and that the work of man is always lacking and can never accomplish what God has already completed (It is not by works of righteousness that He saves us.)

We could certainly make the argument that God’s rightful place is on the throne of our very lives and many have placed themselves on that throne and they follow their own ideas rather than any proclamation from God as to what is righteous. To claim that man is his own god pretty much exposes the sinfulness of man apart from God.

There is one additional thing that must occur before all this can take place. Paul wrote about this in the next few verses:

### **Remembering the Truth**

<sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? <sup>6</sup> And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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; <sup>9</sup> that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:5-12 (NASB95)

As they say, “we didn’t get that memo.” In other words, we weren’t there when Paul told them “these things” and apparently there is no record that anyone has as to the specifics of what he told them. The **third thing** that was (or is) needed to happen related to the removal of restraint that was (or is) holding back the lawlessness. Just as there are several possibilities available to explain the first two things that need to occur, there are different ideas as to what or who is this third thing.

Those who argue that the “man of sin” is the succession of popes and all the hierarchy of Roman Catholicism will make the argument that the Roman Empire with its tight control on everything was “that which restrained.” With the fall of the Roman Empire, there was a rise to power of the catholic church and the Papist exerted control over all Europe for a period of about 1260 years (538 to 1798) which would correspond to 1260 days or three and a half years. Some will argue that just as 70 weeks (7 x 70 = 490 days) of Daniel actually corresponds to 490 years that three and a half years is 1260 days which is to be interpreted as 1260 years. During this time, there was severe persecution for those who did not go along with the false teachings of the popes and many people died for their beliefs.

Those who argue that the “man of sin” is some superman (the Anti-Christ) of the future, the restraint is said to be the Holy Spirit rather than any human government since governments

are in cahoots with Satan and even if they were not, they would be not be strong enough to restrain what Satan wanted to do. This argument then goes on to say that the Holy Spirit will be removed when the church is raptured. All this begs the question as to how anyone can be saved in the post rapture era when the anti-Christ persecutes the saints if the Holy Spirit is not active in the affairs of man since the word of God clearly states that no one can be saved except the Holy Spirit draws them.

For those who think that the man of sin is simply the revelation of how sinful natural man really is, the restraint can be argued to be a combination of things such as general morality, laws based on Judeo-Christian principles, and the influence of the church. As the culture abandons traditional values and prohibits any expression of Christian principle or even arguments of morality based on Biblical teaching, then restraint will be, in effect, cast off.

We can find explanations for the idea of “miracles and lying wonders” for these three possibilities. For example, in the case of the Papists, the argument is made that the “miracles” that the church recognized were fabrications or simply misinterpretations of natural phenomena. In the case of the things some future anti-Christ will do, the argument is made that Satan does have power to imitate real miracles with the “magic arts” such as the magician of Pharaoh did in response to the signs and wonders performed by Moses. I do not know what the “humanists” can do other than point to all the great inventions and discoveries that man has accomplished and claim that these are proof of the greatness of man. At the same time, all the miracles of the Scriptures are either denied or an attempt is made to explain what happen with a natural phenomenon.

Regardless of who or what it is that opposes God, Jesus will deal with it or him when He comes back. The outcome is destruction. The sad thing is that before that happens many will be deceived and will come to ruin because they refused to believe the truth and chose to believe a lie. In the first Chapter of Romans, Paul wrote that when such things happen, God simply allows them to believe the lie – “He gave them over to a reprobate mind.”

The bottom line is the we don’t know the details of what is going to happen and how much of what Paul wrote about has already happened or whether we are witnessing the “falling away” and removal of restraint in our life time. So what should we do?

### **Stick with the Game Plan:**

<sup>13</sup> But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB95)

This is a word of strong assurance and encouragement. The Christians at Thessalonica needed that because of the evil in the world and the persecution they were experiencing. It was a time when “anti-Christian” forces were in power and things were not going well. That was not the time to give up and lose hope. Why?

1. Someone was praying for them – they were not alone in the battle.
2. God loved them
3. God had chosen and saved them
4. God was continuing to save them in the sanctifying work of the Spirit

We can apply each of these reasons to ourselves today and realize that in spite of any uncertainty in life we have assurance of salvation based on the faithfulness of Christ.

14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. What was the Gospel? (It was the message of God's Grace - our Trust in God's provision - our Obedience to Christ's commands) What is the purpose of the calling?

1. Salvation! The full salvation - Justification, Sanctification, Glorification - GRACE

Justification: Declaration of our having the Righteousness of God.

Sanctification: Development of our having the Righteousness of God.

Glorification: Demonstration of our having the Righteousness of God.

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

When the enemy seems to get the upper hand, what is our response?

1. Stand firm – TRUST

2. Hold to the teachings – OBEY

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

When we encounter problems in life, we tend to do what? Try harder. Most of the time, we turn to what we trust in most. And what is that? Ourselves! We tend to rely on our wits or our resources. In What or in Whom should we be trusting? We trusted Jesus to save us at the very beginning, we should also trust Him now. Why?

1. His love for us has not changed.

2. His grace is still there.

3. He supplies eternal encouragement and hope which we find in our fellowship with God and in His word.

4. Our obedience (every good deed and word) is not a matter of our doing it in our own strength but in His strength.

Though we are being attacked, criticized, abused or whatever, we must not forget **why** God saved us. There is work to be done. We have been commissioned to take the Gospel to others. We cannot forget the rest of mankind who have not experienced the salvation we have. Paul prayed for them that God would encourage and strengthen them even as He had done for Paul and those who were ministering with him. In tough times, we all need encouragement and strength to be doing the work God has called us to do.