

## 2:1–17 Correction for Misunderstanding the Parousia, part 2

Last week we started looking at this text, and today we'll continue.

I mentioned last week that the word “coming” in vs. 1 is the Gk word “Parousia.” The word means “presence, arrival.” We describe Jesus’ return as his Parousia.

Paul is responding to some questions the people of Thessalonica had concerning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. They were “shaken in mind” and “troubled” about this, because some false teachers had been claiming that the “day of Christ is at hand” (2:2). So this chapter gives us some information about when Jesus will return and what kind of things must happen before Jesus returns.

Paul is speaking here about eschatology—the study of last things, end times events. We believe that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming will consist of two main parts—rapture and revelation. Jesus will come for his saints at the rapture and with his saints at the revelation. Paul has in view here the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming, i.e., when he comes in power and glory to establish his kingdom. Most of what he says here will happen just before Jesus’ glorious return, i.e., during the tribulation.

Paul teaches three things in this passage to correct any misunderstandings of the Parousia.

I. The Parousia should not cause anxieties. (2:1–2) There is no need to be “shaken in mind” or “troubled” about these things. The Day of the Lord has not yet come and it is not “at hand.”

He knows that because...

II. The Parousia will be preceded by an apostasy. (2:3–12)

A. .3a Do not be deceived about this. False teachers had been trying to lead them astray, but they should not listen to them.

B. .3b Expect a falling away first. This is the great apostasy, a major rebellion against Christ and his church that will happen around the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming.

C. .3c-4 Expect the Antichrist to be arrive first. He’s the “man of sin” and the “son of perdition.” He opposes Christ and will enter the temple, claim to be god, and demand worship.

Paul tells us in today’s passage that something is currently preventing or restraining end times events from happening now. Before end times events happen ...

D. .6 Something restraining has to be taken out of the way.

1. Something is currently preventing the next set of events from happening.

2. The KJV has “what withholdeth.”

The verb (κατέχω) means “to hold back or restrain.” This is a construction (ptc) meaning “that which is holding back.” So something stands in the way of the events of the last days from happening now. Something restrains, and it has to be taken out of the way before the Antichrist shows up.

3. As you might imagine, scholars have various ideas what Paul is talking about. What is restraining the Day of the Lord from happening?

Whatever is withholding must be part of God’s work. The restrainer is fulfilling God’s purposes. This restraint will continue until God removes it. My understanding is that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit.

It would make sense that the ministry of the HSp would change or end when the rapture happens, when the bride of Christ is taken away. With the HSp taken away, the great apostasy will come. All believers will be removed, and the HSp will apparently quit restraining sin. The result will be a great apostasy, as we talked about last time.

4. .6end All this will be “revealed in his time.”

a) I.e., at the proper time.

b) Whatever is withholding will continue to do so until the right time/season happens according to God’s timetable.

c) The word for “time” (καιρο) often means “season.”

d) God will reveal all of this in his time. He will continue to restrain until the proper time arrives. Until that time, the HSp will continue to do his ministry of retraining sin.

5. .7 The one restraining will eventually be “taken out of the way.”

a) .7a A lawless mystery is already at work.

(1) A mystery (μυστηριον) is something secret, something unrevealed. The word does not describe something creepy or scary, just something not yet revealed.

- (2) This is the mystery “of iniquity.” The word (της ἀνομίας) is literally “the lawlessness.” Thus, the “secret power of lawlessness.”
- (3) This mystery is hidden right now, but it “doth already work (ἐνεργεῖται—pres mid)” I.e., it’s already in place, already operating; like it’s ready to go.

The sense seems to be that the HSp will restrain sin somewhat until the rapture, at which time he will stop restraining sin, and the result will be a deep apostasy and rebellion under the influence of the Antichrist. Rebellion will break out when the HSp stops restraining, the church is removed from earth, and the Antichrist arrives on the scene.

**App:** Part of what restrains wickedness in our world is the presence of Christians. We are supposed to be like salt and light in a dark and dying world. Many Christians around the world promote godliness and restrain evil. Imagine what the world would be like without that moral influence? That’s what’s going to happen after the rapture—very little Christian influence will remain in the world.

- b) .7b This text contains a rather obscure statement.
  - (1) In the KJV, we have “he that letteth will let.”
  - (2) Historically, the word “let” meant “hinder, hold back.” E.g., the use of the word in tennis—a “let” ball. The meaning of the word has changed to the opposite.
  - (3) So the sense is, “He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.”
  - (4) Whatever is restraining will continue to do that, until he/it is taken out of the way.

What is restraining? What obstacle will be removed before the coming of the Antichrist? That’s a mystery—it’s unrevealed as of yet. It could be the HSp or the church. At some point in the future, this obstacle will be removed, and then ...

6. .8a “that Wicked shall be revealed” – i.e., “that wicked one.”
- a) When the restrainer is taken out of the way, the lawless one will be revealed (cf. vs. 3)—the man of sin, the son of perdition, i.e., the Antichrist.
  - b) Paul is emphasizing the time frame here – “and then.” Only when the one restraining is taken out of the way will that wicked/lawless (ἀνομος) one be revealed. Perhaps he will lead the world in this great apostasy.

And that’s when things really fall apart. With no restraint from God, and with all the Christians gone, the lawless one/man of sin will be free to do his worst. And many people will follow him in his rebellion against God.

**Instead of dealing with the rest of vs. 8, let’s skip ahead to vss. 9-12** – further description of this sinful man and those who follow him.

(1) .9a His coming is after the working (ἐνέργεια—action, operation, energy) of Satan. This word is normally used of supernatural power. He gets his power from Satan, and he is much like Satan in his works. He is not Satan himself, but he is empowered by Satan.

.9b The miraculous works of Satan described here are not tricks or sleight of hand; they are not counterfeit or false; they are real miracles. These are genuine miracles done through satanic power, and they will deceive many into following the man of sin.

(2) .9end He will have miraculous power.

The “working of Satan” will be very impressive and very convincing; that’s why many people will follow the Antichrist.

**Quote:** This master of trickery will have at his command all the energy and skill of Satan to mislead and deceive.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew 24:24 *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

- (3) .10 He will deceive the unsaved.
- (a) “deceivableness of unrighteousness” – (ἀπάτη τῆς ἀδικίας) i.e., unrighteous deception; every sort of unrighteous deceit. The Antichrist will be a master of fraud; he will lead many astray through deception.
  - (b) .10 Paul describes the unsaved as “them that perish,” lit., “the ones being destroyed.” The word here (ἀπολλυμι) refers to something destroyed or ruined, something perishing.  
“Every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing”<sup>2</sup>
  - (c) .10b Why are they perishing or being destroyed? Because “they received not the love of the truth.” Their vulnerability to deception is self-imposed; they intentionally decided to reject the truth and to follow deceit. Instead of embracing the gospel, they embraced a lie, and they are accountable for their choice.

Cf. 1:8—know not God, obey not the Gospel

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<sup>1</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 2 Th 2:10.

<sup>2</sup> Rober L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 327.

I.e., they rejected the truth of the Gospel. In order to be saved, you must accept—“love”—the truth. The message about Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). Those who accept it are saved; those who reject it are lost—they are being destroyed now and are destined for eternal destruction.

Implicit in all of this is responsibility or accountability. That is, they had the choice of loving the truth or loving error. They chose the unrighteous deceit of the Antichrist instead of the truth of the Gospel. That will result in their damnation; they will not be saved because of their own choice.

The Antichrist deceived them through his powerful signs and wonders. He deceived them unrighteously. As a result, they did not love the truth; they rejected salvation. They are responsible for their own choices.

The Bible clearly maintains human responsibility. Salvation is a choice; you either love the truth or you love error. God holds you responsible for your choice of truth or error.

- (4) In vss. 11-12, Paul continues to describe what will happen to the unsaved under the influence of the Antichrist. Why do the unsaved not love the truth; why don't they get saved? In response to their rejection of the Gospel, ...

(a) .11 “God shall send them strong delusion.”

“strong delusion” (ἐνεργειαν πλανης) – a “powerful error.”

“delusion” (πλάνη) means “wander, go astray; error.” Since these people refuse to love the truth, they'll believe an error.

God will confirm them in unbelief by compounding what Satan has already done. Satan misled and deceived them, and now to confirm his judgment against them, God will send them a powerful delusion.

- (b) .11b They will “believe a lie”
  - (i) The purpose is that they might believe “the lie” (τῷ ψευδεῖ).
  - (ii) “the lie” in view here is probably a reference to the Satanic error from the Antichrist. They reject the Gospel and follow the man of sin.

**Quote:** They will mistake someone else and his lying promises for God and his truth.<sup>3</sup>

Romans 1:25 *who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, ...*

- (c) .12a the result—“they all might be damned.”
  - (i) This is the word for “judged” (κρίνω). In this case, the result of judgment will be final and eternal damnation.
  - (ii) God’s purpose (ἰνᾶ) is to judge these people. God is working actively to insure their damnation.

They made their choice to reject the truth and to live in sin. They chose to live for their own pleasure rather than obey the Gospel.

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<sup>3</sup> Rober L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 328.

(iii) God holds them accountable for this choice by sending them a strong delusion, which simply confirmed them in their sin. They followed the Antichrist, and now they will share his judgment.

[ This will be the miserable destiny of the lost when Jesus returns. My understanding is that, at the rapture, Jesus comes to take his people with him—the church. Those remaining will enter the Tribulation; and during that period, they will be enthralled by the Satanic power of the Antichrist. Many people will be led astray by him and refuse to be saved. Their destiny will be damnation—eternal condemnation. ]

It might surprise us that God would act intentionally to insure the damnation of certain people. God actually works to enhance this error that leads to their judgment. But that's what the text says. Once these people have confirmed that they want the Antichrist and his satanic deceit instead of the truth, God will confirm them in this error so as to guarantee that they will be damned.

This seems to imply that everyone who has heard the Gospel and rejects it at the time when Jesus returns will be lost and subject to God's judgment.

Paul gives two reasons for this judgment:

- (d) .12b They “believed not the truth” – they rejected the Gospel. They were not ignorant of it; they heard it and rejected it. It’s true that Satan led them astray; it’s true that God sent them a strong delusion/error. Still, they are accountable for their failure to believe the truth. God will judge them because they “believed not the truth.” It was their choice.

We see in this passage an amazing convergence of both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. God will send them a strong delusion, but they are still responsible for their rejection of the truth. They are lost because of their decision not to believe.

- (e) .12end Instead of believing the truth, they had pleasure (εὐδοκέω) in unrighteousness.

They’ll be judged for both their rejection of the truth as well as their sinful behavior. They intentionally turned away from God and the truth to embrace a lie and sinful pleasure.

**App:** Our world today is not far away from what is described here. People reject the truth and take pleasure in unrighteousness. They hate the Gospel and they love sin. And their condemnation is just; they will get exactly what they deserve.

Let’s finish up then by going back to vs. 8 and learning about the destiny of the Antichrist.

7. **.8b** The career of the Antichrist will be cut short by the coming of Christ.
- a) **.8b** “the brightness (ἐπιφανεια) of his coming (παρουσια)” – i.e., Christ’s coming in power and glory will destroy the Antichrist. This is the revelation of Christ, the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.
- b) The Lord will consume (ἀναλίσκω—use up, destroy, overthrow, slay) him with the spirit of his mouth. So the living Word of God will use his words to destroy the Antichrist.

- c) The Lord shall destroy (καταργέω) him with the brightness of his coming (παρουσία).
  - (1) The word “destroy” means “to render useless.” So the great and powerful Antichrist will ultimately come to nothing; he’ll be utterly destroyed.
  - (2) And what destroys him? “the spirit of his mouth” – the word of God, a mere word spoke by Christ will destroy the Antichrist and all his henchmen.
- d) The victory of Christ over his enemies will be complete. When Jesus appears, he will destroy Satan’s power as reflected in the Antichrist.

Isaiah 11:4 ... *He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.*

Re 19:15 *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

**Quote:** The visible presence of the Lord Jesus in the world will put an immediate stop to an accelerated diabolical program.<sup>4</sup>

A couple of final observations:

None of this has happened yet. The great apostasy has not happened, the restrainer has not been taken out of the way yet, the man of sin has not been revealed, and obviously Jesus has not returned. These are all future events, and they are all connected; when the apostasy arrives and the restrainer is taken out of the way, then the other events will happen in order. We are futurists when it comes to eschatology. The initial phase of Jesus’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming could happen at any time. The rapture of the church will initiate all the events the Paul mentions here.

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<sup>4</sup> Rober L. Thomas, “2 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 326.

Because Christians will go with the Lord at the rapture, we will not experience any of this. We may see some of these things on the horizon, but we'll miss most of it because we'll be raptured out of here. The only people experiencing these things are unbelievers. And sadly, these are the very people who have heard the Gospel but utterly reject it. They'd rather follow the lies of the Antichrist than follow Jesus. The result for them will be delusion, deception, and ultimately, damnation.

A very good reason to be saved is to avoid the coming judgment of the wicked. Only those who believe the truth of the Gospel will be saved. Those left behind at the rapture will experience the dreadful things Paul mentions here.

We should remember that right now God is restraining sin, and one of the ways that he does that is through the influence of Christians and the church. We must be salt and light in our dark world. All of the events in view will happen in the future, but right now our job is to join with God in his work of proclaiming the truth and restraining evil.

