

A Place of Safety? (Part 4)

The Mystery of Iniquity

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I would like to continue with the subject that we have been on for the last couple of weeks and I want to begin this time in I Thessalonians 4: 1-3. I want to go back there in order to set the stage for II Thessalonians and at the same time, maybe prepare to fit ourselves into the subject material a little bit better than before.

I Thessalonians 4:1-3 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

I just wanted to pick up the word "sanctification," because later on in the sermon, it's going to fit and we're going to see it in II Thessalonians the second chapter. He then tells us, beginning in verse 13.

I Thessalonians 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

This is a very familiar section of scriptures for us because we know that he is going to lead to some of the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ. Also to what is going to happen to those who are alive at the time and what is going to happen to those who are dead.

Then in chapter 5:1...

I Thessalonians 5:1-3 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. [What we're going to find in II Thessalonians is that he did have a need to write to them about the times and the seasons.] For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

II Thessalonians 1:6-8, 10 since it is a righteous thing with God to

repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

We can begin to see what is happening to the context. He is beginning to tie his second letter to the Thessalonian church to the first letter, and he did it with a very apparent purpose.

II Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

There it is! Their response to his first letter was to interpret the word "sudden" in what is now chapter 5.

I Thessalonians 5:2-3 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them.

Well, their interpretation of that was immediate; their interpretation was to leap to the conclusion that because Paul was writing about these things, that Jesus Christ was going to come immediately. The result of that was that some of the more unstable and excitable ones in the congregation quit their jobs.

Let's read a little bit further in II Thessalonians and we're going to jump all the way down to chapter 3.

II Thessalonians 3:6-12, 14 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us [What does it mean to walk disorderly and not according to the tradition?]. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you [What does he mean, not disorderly?]; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day [we're beginning to get close to the answer], that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly

manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

So the result of their interpretation was that some of the more excitable ones quit their jobs. His return was one of the important and ever recurring subjects of conversations with those people. Are we talking about this frequently? Let's begin to put ourselves into this. Maybe we haven't gone to the place where any of us have quit our jobs as the result of feeling that the return of Jesus Christ was very close. But you know in times past you have either witnessed or you have heard stories of people who went to what we would consider to be extreme things because they felt that the return of Jesus Christ was going to be at such and such a date. Though they didn't quit their job, they did other things that we can look back upon now as being foolish.

These people added to that by becoming busybodies, spending their time talking excitedly, but doing no work, and so their minds were continually disturbed, excited, by what they thought were signs of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. These people were convinced that the Day of the Lord was already here, and in a very short time Christ Himself would make His appearance.

One of the reasons that I bring this up, is that there is a man out there I will say, who is proclaiming that the man of sin is sitting in the temple of God and therefore implying that the return of Jesus Christ is just around the corner.

Paul wrote II Thessalonians to correct their impression by telling them what Christ had revealed to him, regarding the "gathering together with Christ" of those dead in Christ and those remaining alive whenever He returned. He opens by telling them first of all that Christ's return will be preceded by a period of apostasy. As I told you in last weeks sermon that would include anything from a falling away, a departure from doctrine or teaching, all the way to and including an outright political rebellion.

The second sign would be the appearance of the man of sin. When we left off, we were confronted by the following information: that the man of sin of II Thessalonians 2, the little horn of Daniel 7, the two-horned lamb who spoke like a dragon of Revelation 13 and the false prophet of Revelation 19. We have four different names or titles but all of these men have similar descriptions. The description in each location is not exactly alike, but each adds to what the other gives. I want you to listen to a summary of these comparisons. There are nine of them.

In each case, that is Daniel, II Thessalonians, Revelation 13 and Revelation 19, in each case the person described appears at the time of the end. This is the one piece of information that every one of them has in common.

In three of the four his end, that is the destruction, his annihilation comes at the return of Jesus Christ.

In three of the four it directly states or very strongly implies the person speaks with great pompous words.

In three of the four it directly states the person does miraculous, supernatural signs.

In two of them the signs are done in the presence of the beast, so they're not the same person.

In two of them he deceives and leads people into idolatry.

In two of them he either makes war against the saints or he causes those who would not worship the beast to be put to death.

In two of them he either thinks to change times and law—the implication is *of* God—or he sets himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Therefore implying that he has the authority to do these things.

In two of them his period of greatest influence is three and a half years.

I submit to you that all of these scriptures are describing the same person. When other prophecies are added to these, such as the one in Revelation 17, where we see this personage in a symbolic position guiding a beast (that is the great false government that is anti-God). The Bible is showing that this person—the man of sin—has as a direct connection to a large political power and has a religious influence. I want to impress that we are dealing with a personage and with prophecies *of* global significance.

Yes, they involve the true church, but they are not restricted to it, even though Paul is focusing on how the church can be warned and prepared by these signs. Now for example: Is the return of Christ of global significance? I mention this because that is the overall context. When one goes all the way back in I Thessalonians, beginning in the fourth chapter and leads right on through II Thessalonians—that is the setting. It is the return of Jesus Christ, and it is of global significance. God says in another place that every eye is going to see Him. Okay, the man of sin is taking active part in these end-time events.

I want to add to this thought. What about the majority of the prophecies in the book of Revelation? Are those things of global significance? Is the breaking of the seals of global significance? How about the blowing of the trumpets? How about the seven last plagues?

We all know they are of global significance. They aren't concerned with end-time events that only include the Church of God. They are of global significance; the whole earth is being affected by these things. What about Matthew 24, Luke 21? What about Mark, the 13th chapter? God is not talking about things of minor curiosity to the world. He is not doing His end-time work in a corner—any more than the birth of Jesus Christ was done in a corner or the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or the taking of Israel out of Egypt. These prophecies, in which we find the man of sin deeply involved, are things of worldwide significance.

II Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness [or iniquity] is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

Paul wrote II Thessalonians in the early 50s AD and the mystery of iniquity, the mystery of

lawlessness was already working. Now hold your finger there and go back to Galatians, and this too was written in the early 50s AD. Brethren we are only talking about a period of time—about 19 or 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ—and already the mystery of iniquity was at work and it was beginning to have negative impact on the Church of God.

Galatians 1:6-7 I marvel [Paul says] that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; [in other words, it's not really good news] but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

The mystery of iniquity was already working. Now continuing to hold your finger there in II Thessalonians, let's go to the book of Acts 20:28-31. This same apostle is saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders, men that he would never see again.

Acts 20:28-31 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "For I know this, [it was already working] that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Paul understood, Paul knew the history of truth of God. He had the old testament there, he knew that people could not hold on to the truth. He knew that back in the days of Moses that a false religion was working, even way back then. He understood those things; he could see that if it happened back then, it's going to happen in his day too. Because the mystery of lawlessness was already going on. Acts 20 was a little bit later than the early part of 50 AD, but what in the world was going on here?

Let's go back to the book of Revelation (we're still going to come back to II Thessalonians), but in Revelation the sixth chapter, we'll tie several things together—the breaking of the seals on this seven seals scroll.

Revelation 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

This was not something good for the world. This was a plague, even though he happened to be on a white horse and the good guys always wear white, don't they? No, it was a facade, it would appear to be good, but it was not good. Jesus Christ interprets this back in Matthew 24:3-5, whenever his apostles asked Him the signs of His coming.

Matthew 24:3-5 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. [The white horse of Revelation the 6th chapter is matched by this description in Matthew the 24th chapter, Jesus is explaining the first seal, and the white horse is going to be a religious deception] "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

Religious deception—the first of the seals. It was broken open. I mean, the seal was broken and that prophecy began to be fulfilled even in the days of the apostles.

Revelation 17:5 And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. [What was occurring was the Babylonian mystery religion was infiltrating the church.]

Continuing this theme, with the understanding that the Babylonian mystery religion (the mystery of lawlessness) was at work at the time that the apostle was writing these things. Let's go to II Timothy 4:3-5, as we continue to show you that the apostles were writing about what was going on in the first century, and they left a very clear trail of these things.

I should interject here that this was the last letter that the apostle Paul wrote and if he died sometime around 67 AD, we would know then that this letter was written probably in 67 AD.

II Timothy 4:3-5 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

We see here indications of the influence of the world, the influence of the Babylonian mystery religion surrounding Christians wherever they might live. Gradually wearing them down, simply by its presence as well as by (from time to time) open persecution against the Christians. Gradually people were weakening rather than being strengthened and beginning to feel that the best thing to do was to give in—inch by inch—to what was going on. And beginning to request of the ministry, things that were not so close to the truth that they had been given by the apostles.

II Peter 2:2-3 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has

not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

He's talking about false teachers, again he is talking about them infiltrating the true church and beginning to wear it down.

Jude 1:3-4 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The mystery of lawlessness was already working. The false church which appropriated the true church's central figure—it's savior Jesus Christ—but rejected the law of God (which we just read in Jude). By rejecting the law of God and inserting pagan beliefs, they also rejected the very central figure (the Christ as well) which is very interesting to consider. We have a dichotomy produced. They accept the name of Christ, they accept the central figure, they accept the great hero and then turn right around and reject His law. That's doublespeak (if I have ever heard of anything) and yet people were falling for it.

Hebrews 10:26-29 For if we sin willfully [sin, the transgression of the law of God] after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins [who was sacrificed? The Savior, the Hero, the Christ], but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Just by rejecting the law of God and inserting pagan beliefs, they also rejected the Christ as their savior as well. Brethren he died to save men from their sins, the transgressions of the law that they rejected. Don't you think that such a thing would be obvious to spot? But they didn't brethren. The true church was torn up by that very thing, and the people in the church were asleep.

You think that can't happen again—when changes that are obviously made to the doctrine that was delivered to us, or made and people are asleep, accepting it... Well it is happening again, and not only that. To me, what I'm going to give you, is almost inexplicable. In Matthew, these people who were rejecting the truth of God and were being overtaken by the mystery of lawlessness also rejected this. It didn't happen all at once.

Matthew 12:38-40 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

They rejected the very sign Christ himself gave that he was the Messiah. He said that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth and they inserted their Good Friday crucifixion, Easter Sunday resurrection tradition. Do you remember Jesus degrading the Jews? It's recorded in Mark 7:7 (A verse that everybody ought to have right in the forefront of their mind. It's so easy to remember. The combination of sevens: Mark 7, verse 7) where He said, "in vain do you worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, making the commandments of God of none effect by your traditions."

Both the Jews and the new testament church did this, thus the mystery of lawlessness was at work and it was making very severe inroads into God's true church. People who had the truth but were not watching and they were asleep at the switch or spiritually unaware. It eroded away their faith, their strength, and pretty soon they had accepted--hook, line and sinker—the message, the false gospel that these people brought.

Now turn with me to I John 2:18. John, the last of the apostles wrote of this subversion as well, and he said:

I John 2:18-19, 22 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist [now here we find a fifth title] is coming, even now many antichrists [the mystery of iniquity, the false prophets] have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, [these particular ones that he was speaking of had actually been in the church] but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out from us that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. [An antichrist means against the Christ, they were against obedience to the Christ. They were anti-law; they were diminishing the law of God.] Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? [now here's another aspect of it] He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son, does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

So we find there that he says that the antichrist is coming. John, here, is pointing to a specific one—the man of sin, the two-horned lamb (you get the point). Even though the verse said that many had already come, he's alluding to that *one* is going to come and that they are to look for that *one* because he will be *the* sign that we are definitely in the time of the end.

When this personage begins to arise and he begins to do the things that are described in God's holy scriptures, then we know that we are getting awfully close. He will begin to do these things well in advance of the tribulation, so that the Christian will be warned. If he doesn't do them until the tribulation, what kind of a sign is that? He has to be doing it before so it will be a sign to us; it has to be done before in order to receive the notoriety, the advertising, whatever is necessary, and the acclaim to attract people to him, to follow him.

I John 4:3 And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

The spirit of it, John is confirming, was in the world. Even as Paul said, the mystery of iniquity is already working. Okay, this is nothing more than the ancient organization whose chief representative at the time of the apostles was one Simon Magus. It was coming into the church from the world, infiltrating the true church. It eventually overwhelmed it by sheer numbers and became a political force as well.

By the time it became a political force, its chief representative was the Bishop of Rome (carrying that title) who later became the Pope. He didn't have that title at first—meaning "father, holy father, a specific holy father"—one who was the Bishop of Rome.

It was this organization (the mystery of iniquity) using the power of the state (Revelation 17) that was responsible for the persecution against the true church. Such persecutions that far exceeded anything Imperial Rome had ever done. The persecutions of this antichrist waged on and off in varying intensities for 1260 years. With some estimates by historians of as high as 68 million people being put to death by it. Is that lawlessness? Is that iniquity?

Those put to death were not all true church members but the true church *was* the main target from time to time, or was a target caught in persecutions aimed at other, usually religious targets.

That church and that line of leaders will culminate in the end time antichrist, the man of sin, the little horn, or the two horned lamb who speaks like a dragon. That is *he* speaks with smooth and enticing deceit.

This does not mean that the present leader of the largest body of the true church is not a man who is sinning. He is and he is leading that body right back into the world, right back into what we came out of, a deficient and failed religious system. The evidence of its failure (this deficient and failed religious system) is all around us in this immoral society. Most of the people, in that society, subscribe to the religion that this "head" is leading the people right back into. So he is leading a departure, he is leading a falling away—not necessary a falling away from the church—but a falling away from truth.

The man of sin will be leading virtually the whole world in rebellion against God. You see a rebellion of global proportions during which he will sit in a sanctuary and arrogate to himself authority over the true church. He will demand the worship of himself, which they will rightfully refuse and this will set off a frightful tribulation against it. Thus the true church gets caught in a

massive rebellion against God. Watch this principal unfold.

We are eventually going to get back to II Thessalonians. Let's go to the book of Genesis, all the way back to Abraham. God is prophesying to Abraham and he says:

Genesis 15:15-16 "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. "But [speaking of those who will come out of Abraham] in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

Well neither is the iniquity of the Babylonish mystery religion yet complete. It is building toward completion though. We find ourselves living 1900 and some years after most of the new testament was written and that mystery of iniquity is building. That's what I'm showing you here.

Hold your finger in Genesis, because we're going to come back here, and with your other hand turn to Matthew 24:37. First thing you know you'll be turning pages with your tongue.

Matthew 24:37 "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

We've jumped from Abraham to the time of the end, and the time of the end is going to feature a period of iniquity that is going to be similar to the times of Noah. Let's go back then to the book of Genesis just to get a brief description of what it was like in the days of Noah.

Genesis 6:5-7 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. [Is that lawlessness?] And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them."

This is what the world is once again building toward. It reached it once before and in a small way it reached it in Sodom and Gomorrah. As we would say today, God blew them away. He did that in order to save their minds, so that they might be resurrected in the second resurrection and have an opportunity. So it was actually in one sense a mercy killing. He did it too, in the days of Noah as well. Intervening before those people's minds became so perverted and twisted that repentance would be impossible. We are building toward that kind of a circumstance once again.

Let's go back to II Timothy chapter 3, where we get a description of the kind of society that we are going to be living in. In fact, you can see it, we are living in this kind of a society. But it has to get greater in intensity still.

II Timothy 3:1-5, 12-13 But know this, that in the last days perilous [it means terrible, violent and dangerous, hard to bear] times will come: [Why?] For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness [Oh the mystery of iniquity is a religion. It has a form of godliness, it uses the name of God, it uses the name of Christ, it speaks of Him in laudatory terms and then rejects His law with their lives] but denying its power. And from such people turn away! Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Is the man of sin going to deceive? In Revelation 19, let's bring this to bear.

Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

The beast and the kings of the earth—iniquity has mounted to the place where mankind is now going to go to war against God.

Do you believe that Satan ever mounted an attack against God? Even going up to heaven to do it? Is he leading mankind right down the same primrose path? And he's doing it in the name of religion. Oh, is he slick! Let's turn to Revelation 17.

Revelation 17:12-14 "And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful."

Now one more scripture in regard to this.

Revelation 16:13-14 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

The whole world gathered to fight against Christ at His coming. God has a schedule and with His wisdom He knows how long it's going to take for people to get into a state of almost absolute lawlessness against Him on a worldwide scale.

This is the kind of events that the man of sin is playing a leading part. He is not someone associated with the true church, he is someone associated with the mystery of iniquity. So the final push toward this is going to be led by the beast and his evil companion in evil, the false prophet.

I think these scripture clearly show the man of sin (of II Thessalonians 2) to be a religious figure, not a leader of a portion of the true church effecting doctrinal changes within that small group. But a man working hand and glove with the beast on the world scene, affecting changes on a worldwide basis and having his headquarters within the perimeters of the beast power. A truly godly leader in the true church at any time in history since Christ will not be exercising power within a civil government. Christ said to come out of the world, not be a part of its very governing system. A true man of God would be obeying God.

Again to reiterate Paul said that the mystery of iniquity was already working in his day. Christ hadn't come, and Christ hasn't come yet. This means then, that the mystery of iniquity is progressive in nature, but it's going to build in intensity to a climax just before the return of Christ when all restraints are off.

Remember what I told you when we were going through that description of the seven seals of Revelation—how when one seal is opened, it remains open? Then a second seal is opened and so another problem is added to the first one and increases a bit in intensity. The same with the third, and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and the seventh and so forth. If I had any of seals to say that we might be in, I would have to say, that right now the fourth seal has been broken and we are somewhere there in the midst of some of the fulfillment of that seal.

II Thessalonians 2:9-10 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

These verses I think directly re-involve the true church into the stream of things. First there is apostasy that is taking place, a turning away, a departure from true doctrines. It is taking place in the true church at the end time, as it becomes more Laodicean.

In addition to this in Matthew the 24th chapter, Jesus stated.

Matthew 24:11-12 Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness [The mystery of iniquity, the mystery of lawlessness gradually growing in intensity, especially in it's deceptive powers.] will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

Well, it has to be the love of those who are in the true church. So we have then, the church at

the end time growing more Laodicean from the inside. It is going away from the doctrines that were once delivered to it. On the outside we have the mystery of iniquity growing in intensity and this, in turn, puts more and more pressure on those who are in the church—more and more pressure to turn away from the truth of God in the conduct of their daily lives. So Jesus says "He that endures to the end..." He's saying, *Hang on!*" He is certainly alluding to the fact that there is going to be a great deal of moral and spiritual pressure from anti-moral and anti-Christian forces being put on those who are part of the true church.

We find that the man of sin's appearance will be with many signs. They will truly be astonishing performances (miracles), but all of his display of power will be for the purpose of deceiving. That can be translated to a deceit that originates in unrighteousness, the unrighteousness in the heart. The miracle is real but it is done to deceive. But the ones affected by this are the ones who are perishing. That is so interesting. Now why? Because they did not have a love of the truth. The true church is departing from it; the false church is ridiculing it. Those who are going to perish had truth available to them, but they didn't love it, that's the difference.

What does one do, when one loves someone or something? Doesn't that love dictate or motivate the actions? Absolutely it does. When one loves something, or someone, one will give of one self for the sake of that which is loved. That proves whether the love is there. So these people hardened themselves, they would not give their lives over to what they heard and repent.

II Thessalonians 2:11-12 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie [I think that it is the lie that has to do with the man of sin, the mystery of iniquity that is working there.], that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

It means that from God's perspective, these people had the truth presented to them and they didn't love it. It does not mean that these people did not agree with it, it means that they didn't love it. What does it mean (in the light of that) when God gives them strong delusion? There are answers to this right in the scriptures; we'll just turn to one.

Romans 1:24-26 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts [What did He do? He gave these people over to their own thinking], to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.

When it says that God sends a delusion, it means that He quits (at this point) trying to save them, and gives them over to their own desires. So they placed their delight—their desires—in unrighteousness. What is Paul admonishing these people [to do], in a practical way—in some way that you and I can profit from? What he is saying brethren, is in the kind of situation in

which we are dealing, a Christian cannot be neutral.

Isn't that what the Laodiceans are shown as being—fence sitting neutrals, lukewarm, neither all the way in the world nor all the way in the church? We are either going to love the truth of God, or we aren't going to love the truth of God. We are either going to give ourselves over to it, or we won't give ourselves over to it, even though we may agree with it. So, he's saying don't be neutral. Love it. *Love it.*

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here comes that word "sanctification" again. Sanctification brethren, is just the opposite of apostasy. Apostasy means, "to depart" from truth, "to depart" from God. Sanctification on the other hand, is becoming more attached to God until Christ's image is formed in us. So we see a contrast then between those condemned and those who are going to receive salvation, those who are going to be rescued because they love the truth.

II Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Does this not sound just like the advice Christ gave in Matthew 24? "He that endures to the end." Doesn't this sound exactly like the advice that was given to the Philadelphians in Revelation 3, "hold fast that what you have?" The word Paul used here in the Greek means *to cling to*. It is indicating continuous action, not just a grabbing onto and then maybe letting go.

The important thing for us, at this point, is not that we just have been made aware of the signs that precede Christ's return, but what we do with what we have been given.

Remember Jesus admonishment to "watch and to pray always, that you might be accounted worthy to escape all these things." I don't know of anybody in the church who does not remember those words. We can't forget. We don't forget the words, but what are we doing about it?

Let's go back to Isaiah 33:14-19 and we will conclude on this scripture. We used this earlier in talking about the place of safety. It says:

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

In other words who's going to survive? Who's going to escape these things? And so the answer comes. Here is whose going to be worthy to escape all of these things.

Isaiah 33:15 He who walks righteously [that means to keep the commands of God].

Psalms 119:172 gives us a definition of what righteousness is, "All my commandments are righteousness." We understand that the righteousness of Christ is what has to be in us. But we also have to understand that we have to make effort on our part to keep the commands of God. What we have here in Isaiah 33 is very similar to what David wrote in Psalms 15. "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" David says. The "who" is going to be in Zion, the parallels are there.

Isaiah 33:15 He who walks rightly and speaks uprightly...

That's a hard thing to do. James says that the person who can control his tongue, the same is a perfect man. This thing is setting high standards; it's giving us something to shoot for in our lives, things of practical value.

Isaiah 33:15 ...he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes [he says "*No, no, I don't want that.*" He will not accept the payment under the table, he keeps his hand closed. In other words he is a honest and upright person in his dealing with other people] who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed [oh, that's a hard one, we listen to gossip while somebody slanders the character of others, it's a tough call, difficult to deal with, but again it sets a high standard] and shuts his eyes from seeing evil.

It doesn't mean that the Christian is naive. Instead, it means that the Christian doesn't put himself into a position where he is going to be the witness of evil. He doesn't run with that kind of crowd. You might think of this in relation to the entertainments that we seek. What kind of music that it is that we are listening to, it involves the ears. What kind of entertainments are we watching? Television and movies. Think those things don't have an impact on the mind? If it doesn't have an impact on the mind, then these billions of dollars that are being spent on advertising are just being wasted, because they think that hearing a message and seeing a message at the same time will motivate you to do something: buy their product. Doesn't it follow logically then that if we go see and witness something that is foul and is against the law of God (in terms of entertainment) that it's going to have some vile impact upon us? Maybe even in our home... Something to think on.

Isaiah 33:16 he will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure [meaning that God is going to provide for that person].

Well brethren our works can never save us. But among other things they confirm that we fear God, they confirm that we have faith in God, they confirm that we love God and Jesus Christ.

Because he said that if you love me, keep—*do, obey*—my commandments. We are saved by grace, but created unto good works by which we glorify God through the works which He does in and through us.

Now we will stop right here, and I have committed myself to one sermon that will summarize and provide us hopefully with a lot of advice that we need from God's word to understand where our faith and hope needs to be in regard to this information about the place of safety, the gathering together, and the man of sin.