

Lessons From I Thessalonians

The Lawless One

(II Th 2:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

1. Good Evening,
 - a. Greeting...
2. Series of “Lessons From II Thessalonians.”
 - a. Last week we looked at “Vengeance Is Mine.”
 - i. **II Th 1:5-6** “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you”¹
 - b. This week we are going to look at “The Lawless One.”
 - i. **II Th 2:3** “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction”
3. Paul’s concern
 - a. We see Paul shift to a concern he had about our brethren here in Thessalonica.
 - i. Paul spends this section of the chapter correcting and adjusting the thinking of the Thessalonians concerning the Second Coming of Christ.
 - b. The Thessalonians had become “shaken in mind” and “alarmed” thinking the day of the Lord had already come and gone.
 - i. It appears they thought this because they had misunderstood Paul’s first letter on this (**I Th 4:13-5:10**) and had been deceived by a bogus letter that purported to be from apostles (**II Th 2:2-3**).
 - c. Thus...
 - i. Paul is going to explain events that must take place before Christ returns.
4. With these things in mind let us examine our text for today concerning this “Lawless One.”

I. The Lawless One’s Characteristics

- A. Many throughout the years have combined Paul & John’s teachings
 1. This is done by considering the “lawless one” and the “antichrist” as the same person or event.
 - i. “If a group of competent Bible scholars were commissioned to make a list of the most significant prophetic sections in the Word of God, you can rest assured that high on that list would be 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. As we peruse this passage carefully we discover that in it Paul is pointing out four significant truths: (1) the Thessalonian Christians were being victimized by false teachers who did not understand prophecy; (2) the coming of the day of the Lord will be marked by two major events; (3) the coming Antichrist is a very unsavory character; (4) the Temple in Jerusalem has to be rebuilt before Christ returns to earth.” (Keep On Keeping On! by Flickett, Harold L. Jr. pg. 129)

¹ All Scriptures are taken from the ESV unless otherwise noted. If other translations are used this is not necessarily an endorsement of the translation.

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- B. Characteristics of the lawless one
1. He is to bring about a falling away or rebellion. (3)
 - i. The Greek word here is apo-sta-se-a.
 - a. "to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (495). New York: United Bible societies.)
 - b. "a falling away, defection, apostasy; in the Bible sc. from the true religion" (Thayer, J. H. (1889). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti (67). New York: Harper & Brothers.)
 - ii. In other words there will be a movement to no longer follow Christ or His Word.
 - a. There is a definite article in front of apostasy meaning literally "the apostasy."
 - b. This shows that the rebellion was not a principle of defection from Christ but rather a movement from Christ.
 2. He was not yet fully revealed. (3)
 - i. As we will see he was in the process of being revealed already but was not formed in such a way as to make himself known to the young saints at this time.
 3. He is the "man of sin or lawless one." (3, 8)
 - i. This shows his character. He has no desire to obey God's Word hence lawlessness."
 - a. **I Jn 3:4** "Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness."
 4. He is the son of perdition or destruction. (3)
 - i. This shows his eventual ending (vs 8) destruction by Christ.
 5. He exalts himself and presents himself as God. (4)
 - i. Though he tries to "look like God" he is nothing like God. He goes against God at every turn.
 - ii. Satan is good at this.
 - a. **II Co 11:14** "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."
 6. He will sit in the temple of God. (4)
 - i. This cannot be the Jewish temple for a few reasons.
 - a. First the Greek word for temple here is "ναός" or "nō-ōn"
 1. Paul uses it eight times and never once does he use it to refer to the Jewish temple.
 - b. Second there is not one time that the phrase "temple of God" is used after Christ's death to refer to the Jewish temple.
 - ii. This is not unusual symbolic language either found in the Bible.
 - a. **Is 14:13-14; Ek 28:2**
 1. Here we find similar symbolic not literal language.

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- iii. The temple of God "is" used to refer to the church however.
 - a. **II Co 6:16** "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." (NKJV)
 - b. **I Co 3:16** "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (NKJV)
- 7. He is a deceiver through lying wonders. (9-10)
 - i. Notice it is never said that he will perform legitimate miracles.
 - a. Lenski had this to say, "So many are ready to attribute real miracles to Satan and to his agents; the Scriptures never do." (<http://tinyurl.com/3fgezg7>)
 - b. The Message translates verse 9 as "The Anarchist's coming is all Satan's work. All his power and signs and miracles are fake" (Though a horrible translation usually, the commentary is accurate here minus the fact it is not talking about the antichrist.)
 - ii. Just because someone or group does "wonders" that doesn't mean they are miracles.
 - a. Also remember that this one is going to be around when Christ comes back (8) and considering miracles have ceased (I Co 13:9-10; Ja 1:25) this cannot be miracles.
- 8. He was "already at work" during the writing of this letter. (7)
 - i. The Greek "is...at work" is a present, middle, indicative, third person, singular, verb.
 - a. With this verb being in the present, middle, indicative it literally means that this work was "really," not metaphorically, "working its self towards a greater goal." (Ibid)
 - ii. Thus what we see is an infant stage maturing and developing. He was already at work but had not accomplished his goal.
- 9. He was being restrained. (6)
 - i. The Thessalonica saints "knew" who the restrainer was, notice "you know..."
 - ii. This alludes as well to the present working of the lawless one at the time of this letter.
- 10. He would eventually be free from the restraint of him who was restraining. (6-7)
 - i. The restraint would simply "be gone." This is the literal meaning.
 - ii. He would be free to thrive.
- 11. He would survive from at least the time Paul is writing (6) until the Second Coming of Christ. (8)
 - i. At this point he would be destroyed by Christ.

II. The Lawless One Impostors

- A. Some have suggested that this man of sin is "Satan himself"
 - 1. However this can be easily seen as false in **II Th 2:9**. Satan is seen as bringing about this lawless one not "being" the lawless one.

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- B. Some have suggested that the man of sin is simply evil personified
 - 1. However notice that the language here does not add up to such a suggestion.
 - i. First we see that it will be "the" man of sin. This points more to a definite influence rather than a generic one.
 - ii. Second there would be "the" falling away. Once again pointing to a definite fall rather than a generic one.
- C. Some have suggested that the lawless one is going to be a person or two people.
 - 1. The fact that the man of sin is already at work **II Th 2:7** and will not stop until the Second Coming of Christ shows that it will not be any singular human being or two for that matter.
 - i. Unless there is a very old man or two out there right now this simply does not add up to the Word and what we have seen.
- D. Some have suggested that the lawless one or man of sin is the antichrist
 - 1. I would suggest that the two are separate at least as far as the Word of God is concerned.
 - 2. The lawless one is already seen as a particular or unique thing.
 - i. "The" man of sin.
 - ii. "The" falling away.
 - 3. The antichrists as discussed by John inspired by God, are any that "deny the Father and the Son" (**I Jn 2:22**).
 - i. Notice there are many antichrists.
 - a. **I Jn 2:18** "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour."
 - b. **I Jn 4:3** "and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already."
 - c. **II Jn 7** "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist."

III. The Lawless One

- A. The lawless one is...the Roman Catholic Papacy
 - 1. Notice the "falling away" that occurred under Catholicism.
 - i. Slowly over time in the 1st century you had a gradual decline in sound doctrine being adhered to.
 - ii. Before the official power of the pope in 606 notice some of the departures.
 - a. Monarchical bishops, infant baptism, human creeds, a state religion, forgiveness of sins through priests, corruption of the Lord's Supper and others.
 - iii. After the official power was given to the pope in 606 notice the departures.
 - a. The errors of indulgence, worship of images, purgatory, enforced celibacy, the immaculate conception of Mary, the infallibility of the pope when said to be the Vicar of Christ.
 - 1. Did you see that the Bible is never mentioned.

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- iv. Some say it can't be the papacy because it says "man" singular. First remember he or it is seen in the neuter and masculine. Second the Bible has in the past used the singular to imply the plural.
 - a. **I Pt 2:17** "Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."
 - 1. Were they only to honor the present king or all kings?
 - b. **Mt 5:25** "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison."
 - 1. Are we only to come to an agreement with one adversary and then be done?
- 2. Notice the opposing of God and the exalting of one's self into the temple of God even calling himself God under Catholicism.
 - i. "It is the claim of the papacy to have supreme authority to decide for men what they must believe, or suffer eternal punishment. He claims to have power to forgive sins, and even to have power over the souls of the dead." (2 Thessalonians Notes by Parrish, Eddie pg. 40)
 - a. In the Catholic Encyclopedia under Jurisdictional rights and prerogatives of the pope is says, "it is his to set forth creeds, and to determine when and by whom an explicit profession of faith shall be made" (<http://tinyurl.com/6ta62>)
 - ii. "The Pope, a.k.a Papa, Vicar of Christ, Vicar of Peter, Holy Father, Bishop of Rome, Servant of the servants of God, Supreme Pastor, His Holiness, The Rock, Supreme Pontiff, Father of Kings, Governor of the World, Successor of St. Peter, Shepherd of the Universal Church, etc." (<http://tinyurl.com/3bh6d34>)
 - a. The papacy exalts itself to that of deity.
 - b. As the "Vicar of Christ" the pope is the substitute for Christ.
 - iii. If there was anyone that was figuratively sitting on the throne of God...
- 3. Notice that once the restraints were lifted Catholicism thrived.
 - i. There was a very slow departure up to the point of Constantine becoming emperor of Rome.
 - ii. With the end of Roman persecution there was a surge in departures.
 - iii. With the fall of the Roman empire Catholicism became the next "empire."
 - iv. Thus the Roman empire was that which restrained the lawless one from maturing quicker and the empire was "known" to the saints at that time."

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4. Notice the many wonders and lying done under Catholicism.
 - i. The history of Catholicism is flooded with these types of supposed wonders.
 - ii. A Catholic apologist Conway stated, "[God] has allowed His saints to work miracles to prove their divine commission to speak in His name, and to give the world a clear proof of their eminent sanctity. The Church always requires four, or in some instances six, miracles before she proceeds to beatify or canonize a saint." (<http://tinyurl.com/3fgezg7>)
- B. We could continue but why do so...
 1. This is sufficient to show that the lawless one fits perfectly with that which we see in **II Th 2:1-12**.

CONCLUSION²

1. Brothers and sisters let us make sure with all our heart we see the dangers of apostasy and are "ready for that day to come."
 - a. As the song asks, "are you ready, are you ready, are you ready for the judgment day?"
2. Question: Are you ready for the judgment day?
 - a. If so continue therein and grow thereby.
 - b. If not why not?
3. Invitation
 - a. For those that are Christians but are not living for Christ repent by confessing your sins to God that He may forgive you and dedicate your life/time back to Him.
 - i. **I Jn 1:7, 9** "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin...9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - b. For those that are not Christians or for those that think they are Christians and want to know for sure notice what is required to become a child of God or Christian according to God and God only.
 - i. Hear/Study **Rom 10:17; II Tim 2:15**
 - ii. Have Faith In Jesus **Jn 3:16; 8:24**
 - iii. Repent/Turn To God **Ac 17:30; Lk 24:47**
 - iv. Confess Jesus As Lord **Mt 10:32; Rom 10:9**
 - v. Immersed For The Forgiveness of Sins **Ac 2:38; 22:16; I Pt 3:21**
 - vi. Live A Faithful Life **I Jn 1:7; Eph 5:8**

² This sermon outline is largely taken from an earlier sermon I did titled "The Man Of Sin."