

## Beware: the fear of ‘missing out’...

*Unless you’re a Queenslander, you’ve probably never heard of an “Alvey”, but about 5 or 6 years ago, the company that produces the Alvey fishing reels pretty much indicated that they’re going to close up shop and cease production... I didn’t know this, but as we were going on holidays, I needed a new reel (and I wanted an Alvey), but I couldn’t buy one.*

*You see, what had happened, is they made the announcement, and the fear of ‘missing out’ kicked in. Sales went through the roof. Grandpa’s wanted to make sure they had enough stowed away, to be able to bestow a rite-of-passage on their grandsons, of learning to fish the traditional Queensland way, (with an Alvey fishing reel)...*

*Me: I just needed one, but instead of getting one, I ordered 2, and it took about 6 months for them to be delivered...*

*Just as well, though, with Alvey reels becoming a thing of the past, right??? Wrong. Apparently, another company took them over, and 5 years later, they’re still in production, and readily available.*

*Fear of missing out – it’s pretty much what drives the profits of **many** marketing schemes and get-rich-quick schemes & scams. Be quick; This won’t last; It’s a today-only offer....*

*The fear of ‘missing out’, it’s a powerful thing...*

Today’s topic: we’re talking about end times, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus... And we mightn’t realise this, because

we're talking about **end-times** (and Thessalonians is a long way into the New Testament), but the 2 letters to the Thessalonians, were some of the earliest New Testament documents written (written long before the Gospels)...

But it seems that the Thessalonian church, had a real fear of missing out on the return of Jesus... In 1Thess, it seems they might've been afraid that those who have already died might miss out. And Paul reminds them, the resurrection is going to happen. The dead will be raised first, so they won't miss out.

But now they're worrying, "What if Jesus has already returned and we've missed it?"

Maybe they took the "Jesus is coming unexpectedly like a thief in the night" illustration a bit too far. Or maybe somebody was teaching them that Jesus had returned spiritually or something (I don't know)... But they were worried that they somehow might've missed it.

False worry/beliefs take root in a church through various means:

Mis-information through:

- false witness
- false prophecy
- false teaching

And Paul is saying: <sup>3</sup> **Let no one deceive you in any way.**

He gives a few examples: **either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us**

## Mis-information can come into a church through

- writings (these days, think: internet; txt messages; online discussion groups; popular ‘christian’ books that churn out all sorts of strange ideas);
- spoken words. What gets presented as a theory or a ‘thought-bubble’ by one person, is received as ‘fact’ by another;
- It can come in through what Paul calls “a spirit”... in other words, some kind of counterfeit spiritual gift, like a word of knowledge or prophecy... And false prophecies – we are to guard against these things.

Anyway, however the mis-information came, it was mis-information never-the-less. The Day of The Lord, hadn’t come and gone without them noticing. And Paul reminded them: that something else had to happen **before** the Day of the Lord (and the return of Jesus)... He refers to this event as “the rebellion”, and the revealing of “the Man of Lawlessness”.

And **after** that, Jesus returns.

Now, as we read this, we’re going to realise that “the Man of Lawlessness” is another name for Antichrist (1<sup>st</sup> Beast of Rev).

Before Jesus returns, there will be the rebellion. ἀποστασία (apostasia). It describes “rebellion” as in political revolt, but it also means a departure from the faith. At the end of the age, it appears that there’s going to be *a world-wide rebellion against*

*divine authority*<sup>i</sup>. It could be a combination of rebellion against the political rulers that God has appointed, and it will **certainly** include religious apostasy – a rejection of God and His Gospel. People who claim to be godly, perverting the faith.

And the **Man** of Lawlessness will be revealed. In John's letters, John describes this person as "antichrist". And that's a really good description. He mimics Christ, but in a vile way.

- The return of Jesus is described as the "coming" παρουσίας (parousias).
- And the Man of Lawlessness, also has his "coming" (same word).
- The Lord Jesus, will be "revealed" from Heaven ἀποκαλύψει (apokalypsei)
- The Man of Lawlessness will be "revealed", only he's not from heaven – he's the son of destruction – he opposes God.
- The gospel of Jesus is described as a "mystery" μυστήριον (mystērion).
- And we see the "mystery" of Lawlessness already at work.
- Jesus is the Son of God.
- The Man of Lawlessness is the son of destruction (perdition).
- When Jesus came, He came with Spiritual power and performed miracles and signs and wonders.

- The Man of Lawlessness will use Satanic power to perform **false** signs and wonders.

That's why he's called "antichrist". He mimics Christ, but in a vile way.

Now, many people in every generation, have tried to identify who antichrist is... And many have made very confident assertions, but as far as we know, no one has yet been correct... But this is what we learn:

At the end of time, a powerful man will arise. He will oppose, not just the one true God, but **all** religion and all things used as sacred objects of worship. And he'll set **himself** up as the one to be worshipped. Now, we've seen this before:

- Nebuchadnezzar built a gold statue – "You have to worship me". Fiery furnace.
- Nebuchadnezzar once again, looked at all his kingdom and said "I have done this" "Mine is the Kingdom; Mine is the power: Mine is the glory". And God handed him over to go mad and live as a beast in the field, until he looked up to heaven and repented.
- Belshazzar mocked God by using the cups and plates of the temple for his own service – he died that night.
- Darius decreed "No prayer to anybody but me", And Daniel was thrown to the lions.

That's a few Old Testament examples. But:

- In the Roman Empire, Emperor worship became the thing. Roman emperors deified themselves – claimed to be gods. But Christians wouldn't worship them, and were persecuted and executed because of it;

And even in more modern history, totalitarian rulers take for themselves, absolute power and authority, and they demand such loyalty, in effect they receive worship from their subjects.

- in NAZI Germany, images of Hitler were posted everywhere. And whenever you met anyone, or parted from anyone, it was law that you had to give the salute and say “heil Hitler”
- In the many communist revolutions, e.g. China and Russia, Christianity and in fact, all religion was despised and forbidden. In China today, Xi Jinping is coming down harder on churches. And religion is only allowed under state control, which coerces it into worship of the leader and to uphold the values of the communist state.
- In North Korea today, The supreme leader (Kim Jong Un) is worshipped by the population - they adore him.

Now, this might seem strange to us today, who live in a liberal society, but throughout the world, in just about any totalitarian regime, they will have the photo of their ruler everywhere, and allegiance akin to worship, is demanded – that's how they keep control.

And so, to us this might seem far-fetched, but it isn't. It's a reality. It's a historical reality, and it's a present reality. But

there will come a time, when a world-wide dominant popular figure, will rise up. He will oppose God, and it seems like he will oppose all religion, and worship of this leader, will become the new religion.

Now, Paul tells us that the mystery of this lawlessness is already at work. There is something which is continuing to restrain this lawlessness, but there will come a time, when that restraint will be taken away.

What is “lawlessness”? It’s not only breaking the law, it’s failure to **recognise** law, or its failure to recognise the authority of the law or of the law-giver. And this can take place in an ethical/religious sense, and also in a societal/jurisdictional sense.

And we can see both of these at work today and **increasingly** so. Paul says that the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. And it is. It’s getting worse and worse. We’re coming out of an age known as “Christendom”. Our western civilisation was founded on Christian values. But it’s become quite obvious that over the last couple of decades, there is a concerted, systematic, de-Christianisation at work within our society.

- murder of innocent children is called “a woman’s choice”;
- denying of one’s own gender and choosing another one, is protected by law;
- same-sex ‘marriage’ is not only allowed – it’s celebrated;

- same-sex couples are given access to adoption and IVF so they can have kids;
- in some cases, it's illegal to publicly quote scripture, if it makes someone feel they've been vilified;
- The sick and the elderly can be killed, and doctors and nurses who refuse to take part euthanasia can face losing their jobs and being de-registered.

Why has all this (so quickly) come into our society? ....

Because this is what the populace want.

Largely, our generation have turned their backs on God. And they don't even recognise the validity of God's law. "*Who is this god of yours that He should determine what's right and wrong for me today?*" For most people, it's not about "breaking" God's Law – they don't even recognise God's Law, because they don't recognise the Law-giver...

That is lawlessness, from an ethical or religious sense...

But **now**, lawlessness is increasing, and today, societal law (in a judicial sense), is not only broken – it's not recognised.

- Children say to their parents, "You're not the boss of me";
- A parent says of their teenager, "I just can't control him – he doesn't listen to anything I say.";
- A child recognises no authority in their teacher;
- There once was a time when **all** people had a respect for the police. But not anymore. We can see this in our own town, that some folk and even children openly flaunt the

authority of the police, because they know there's nothing they can do to them...

Lawlessness is on the rise.

*There's an active social and political movement, heading towards lawlessness. In the US, people of "wokeness" have been calling to "defund the police" – remove the power of the police. And pretty much wherever this has happened, violence; crime; murder; and mayhem have been the result. And usually it's the least privileged suburbs that are hurt the most. What a surprise. Lawlessness...*

*And even today, in Australia, so-called "Sovereign-citizens" have been saying, "We don't recognise the authority of the commonwealth of Australia, therefore we don't have to obey its laws. Lawlessness..."*

*And even people who claim to be Christians today have been saying, "I'm not going to obey this law or that law, because they don't have the authority over me." Lawlessness...*

Now, when a society descends into lawlessness, that society, becomes ripe for a **new** movement – a **new** leader, to bring a **new** hope and stability. And so will enter the **Man** of Lawlessness (antichrist). He'll be the son of destruction. Does that mean he's born from destruction, or doomed to destruction? Probably both.

But he's described like this:

the son of destruction,<sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of

worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

While I was preparing for today's message, I felt really inadequate, because I cannot give you all the answers today. And I think every commentary I read, all said "This is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to interpret". And the reason it's difficult to interpret, is because it doesn't give us all the answers.

And so, when the man of Lawlessness **takes his seat in the temple of God**, does mean he will literally take a seat in the temple at Jerusalem? If so, this cannot happen until the temple is rebuilt (if it's rebuilt). Or is it, because it's apocalyptic literature, giving us picture-images to tell us something.

Will antichrist:

- be like Antiochus Epiphanes who **did** set up a statue of Zeus in the Jewish temple in 167BC? That was a horrid time.
- achieve what Emperor Gaius (known as Caligula) attempted, to set up his own statue in the Temple?
- reminiscent of 70AD when Roman legionaries set up their standards in the temple court as the temple burned???
- or could it be the building of a mosque on the holy hill where the temple once stood

Or is it a spiritual thing? If, as Ephesians 2 says, the Christian church is the temple of God, does antichrist take a prominent place in the church???

The thing is, we don't know. The problem is, Paul says "You know what I'm talking about", because when he was at Thessalonica in person, he told them about this, and so he didn't have to re-tell everything – he just had to give a few reminders.

Righto. If the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, why hasn't the **Man** of Lawlessness (antichrist) come yet? V6:  
<sup>6</sup> And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

When antichrist comes, forget the Hollywood blockbusters. There isn't going to be a few brave heroes who go into battle against antichrist to save the world. And it's not the duty of Christians to stand up and fight antichrist. Our job, is to remain faithful to Jesus.

**Jesus** is the one, who will kill the Man of Lawlessness simply with the breath of his mouth. Jesus will just say the word, and

antichrist is dead. And all of his evil, amounts to nothing, because Jesus has come.

What a great hope and confidence we have, going into the future. As this age draws to an end, and the Day of the Lord comes, as Disciples of Jesus, we have **nothing** to be afraid of. God is in complete control. Even when antichrist appears, all it takes is a word from Jesus, and he's dealt with.

But what is restraining him now? Is it **something**, or is it **someone**?

In V6, it says "know what is restraining him". V7 says that he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way..

Is it a thing that is restraining the Lawless One, or is it a **person** who is restraining the Lawless One? Well, I think it's both.

Ultimately, it is God who is doing the restraining (who is a person). It is on **God's** timeline that the lawless one will be revealed. **God** is holding Lawlessness back. **God**, is giving an opportunity for the Gospel to be preached.

But even so, God is hardly the one who is going to be taken out of the way.

What or who is restraining the Lawless one? Well, it could be a spiritual thing. It could be an Angel restraining antichrist.

But right from the time of the early church, it's been understood like this:

How does God restrain lawlessness today? Romans 13 tells us. God has appointed governing authorities, as His agents/servants, to keep law and order. And those who resist the authorities, resist what God has appointed, and will receive judgment. As Paul says, our rulers do not bear the sword for nothing...

Have you ever thought of God restraining lawlessness in this way? Our civil authorities.

In times of disaster, when governments become ineffective, people run amuck – looters; rapists; the most powerful and the most evil do whatever they like... They do what they cannot do when a higher power (the state) act with the authority they've been given by God, to restrain lawlessness.

And even from the time of the early church, they could see that the law of Rome, while at times it persecuted Christians, also allowed the Gospel to go forth. Numerous times, Paul would find himself caught up in a lynch-mob, and who would step in and save him? It was the Roman authorities who would come to his rescue.

And so, looking it from this perspective, the **thing** that is holding back lawlessness (and the lawless one) is the governing authorities. And our governing authorities, are personified in a person – the ruler.

And so we **know** that God has appointed rulers (governing authorities) to restrain lawlessness. Maybe, it's these same governing authorities who are restraining antichrist. It could be something else, but this is a likely possibility.

Anyway, there will come a time when God takes away the restraint. I suspect we might be starting to see this, even now. *There once was a time when an election platform of law and order and tough prison sentences was a sure-&-certain vote winner...*

What do politicians campaign for today?

- defund the police;
- decriminalise drugs;
- legalise prostitution;
- we no longer have a penal system (which once had the role of punishing the perpetrator). We have a corrections department (which doesn't punish – it corrects);

The restraints are coming off.

...

V<sup>9</sup> The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,

When it comes to spiritual gifts and miracles and signs and wonders, they can be done by the power of God, **or** by the power of Satan. e.g. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, a sign that God gave Moses to perform, was to throw his staff down, and it became a serpent. But the Pharaoh called his magicians, to draw on the powers of the occult, to do the same

thing. And so Moses turned the waters to blood by the power of God. But Pharoah's magicians (using their dark arts) could also do this.

BTW, when the magicians threw their staffs down to become serpents, Moses' snake swallowed each of the others.

And when antichrist comes, many people will be impressed with his false signs and wonders. But not everyone.

Now, here's the thing: Fair Dinkum Disciples of Jesus will not be impressed by a delusion. Why? Because we love the truth.

An amazing thing here, is:

- this is an activity of Satan, with satanic power and deception; but
- it is God who **sends** this strong delusion...

Let me say that again:

- the coming of the Man of Lawlessness, is an activity of Satan, with satanic power and deception; **but**
- it is **God** who **sends** this strong delusion...

Why would He do that?

*I've known some Christians to have the attitude "This is antichrist at work here. We've got to stop antichrist".* But when antichrist comes, it's **God** who sends him. Is He crazy? No. It's all part of God's plan, and this is why:

## To confirm that those who reject Jesus, do so because they refuse to love truth.

They reject Jesus, not because:

- they haven't had opportunity;
- too busy;
- they had a disadvantaged upbringing;
- they were born in the wrong country...

It's because they refuse to love truth.

I've noticed over the years, that most people's hang-ups about God and Who He is, and What He does, can usually be boiled down to a rejection of the Sovereignty of God.

God is Lord; Master; Supreme. There is no one higher. What God says,,, is...

And throughout the Scriptures, at times (in God's sovereignty), He chooses to use the **ungodly**, for His purposes.

The Roman Authorities were ungodly. They persecuted Christians. But God appointed them to uphold law and order. And He used this ungodly institution for the advance of the Gospel...

But not only this – **God sends them a strong delusion** [a wicked deception], so that they may believe what is **false**

In 1 Kings, God was going to punish the wicked King Ahab. And he put a lying spirit in the mouths of all of Ahab's prophets, to entice him: "You'll win the battle." "Yes, of

course you'll win the battle"... But Micaiah, Ahab knew, always spoke the truth. But he rejected the truth, and believed the lies. And he died in the battle.

The same thing's going on here. The Day of Judgment is coming. Today, we have the opportunity to hear the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's the opportunity to repent of sin, believe in Jesus, and to be born again. We leave sin and unrighteousness behind, and we live anew in Him. This is the truth.

But through antichrist, those who have already rejected the truth, and have pleasure in unrighteousness, will be deluded, and condemned...

You see, as Christians, we have nothing to fear of antichrist. If we love the truth – what is truth – Jesus is the truth. If we love the true Christ, and follow in the way of Christ, we will not be deluded by the Lawless one.

And those who take pleasure in unrighteousness, are one-and-the-same as those who embrace lawlessness. They've believed misinformation; been deluded, because they do not love the truth.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

we thank You that You are truth.

We love You Lord, and we love Your truth.

Lord, guard us against falling into lawlessness.  
Let us never be deluded.

And we pray today,  
for the many in this world,  
who don't know You;  
and haven't believed the truth;  
because they still take pleasure in unrighteousness.

Lord we pray, that by Your Spirit,  
You would draw them to Yourself,  
that they would hear the truth;  
that they would know the truth;  
and that they would be saved.

May we love Your truth so much,  
that we would proclaim Your Name,  
to all who would listen;  
and even to all who would reject,  
so that everyone would have an opportunity  
to hear and be saved.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Bruce, F.F. (1982) *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated (Word Biblical Commentary).