

STAND FIRM AGAINST SATAN WITH FAITH

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

When Timothy returned from the church in Thessalonica and gave his report to Paul about the spiritual condition of the church, Paul immediately wrote this letter. The epistle itself reflects that Timothy gave Paul both favorable and unfavorable news about the church. In chapter one Paul expressed his thanksgiving concerning their steadfast faith in the midst of persecutions and encouraged them in the light of the second coming of Christ to remain steadfast in their faith.

In chapters two and three Paul deals with two problems that were reported to exist in the church. This chapter will tell us that the first problem was caused by a letter that was given to them under Paul's signature telling them that they had missed the Rapture and were suffering the troubles associated with the Day of the Lord: they were in the Tribulation! Paul corrects the misinformation which they had received and consoles them with the truth of what will happen to their persecutors.

I. The Character of the Day of the Lord — 2:1-12

2:1 — Paul turned his attention to the "coming" of the Lord, and the "gathering" of believers to the Lord (the Rapture).

2:2 — The church had been stirred up by spurious words and a fictitious letter from someone or from a group of men, purporting that the Day of the Lord had already come so they were in the Tribulation.

"The day of Christ is at hand" — Most Greek manuscripts have "the day of the Lord" instead of the "day of Christ." The "day of the Lord" in this context would refer to the time of the Tribulation. Sometimes it refers to Christ's Millennial Kingdom. The false letter troubled this church because it said that the Tribulation had already arrived. These false claims were believable because of the intense persecutions they were enduring.

Paul, in response to this false teaching, presents four specific characteristics that would be present, if indeed they were in the day of the Lord. They are as follows:

A. The Rise of the Great Apostasy — 2:3a

"Apostasy" — Some have taken this term, which means "a departure," to refer to the Rapture. This understanding certainly fits the context and would also be consistent with the prominent place the Rapture occupies in these two epistles. However, a couple of points need consideration: (1) the term normally signifies an active choice, a willful departure or a decision to forsake something. But, in the Rapture the believer is passive. He is "being caught up" or "snatched away." by the Lord. (2) Furthermore, the word is consistently used in Scripture in a negative sense, to denote an apostasy from the faith. It seems that if Paul intended to imply the Rapture at this point, a positive term would have been used. Thus it seems best to understand "apostasy" in its natural meaning as a departure from the faith.

Now we have to determine the persons involved in the apostasy. Some interpreters identify the apostate as the false church, the church that departs from faith in Christ and becomes the harlot church during the first half of the Tribulation (Rev 17:1-6, 15-16; 19:2). Other interpreters say the apostate is Israel which rejects her covenant with God for protection and makes a covenant with Antichrist to protect her for seven years, or a "week of years" (Dan 9:27). Both Israel and the false church are related to Antichrist in the Tribulation, but the

seven years specifically refers to Israel in the Tribulation, so we favor Israel as the apostate in this chapter.

The apostasy, that would come before the day of the Lord, is further described in other Scriptures that were written later (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-5; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 3:3-6; Jude). Remember, the Thessalonian epistles were among the earliest written by Paul.

B. The Revelation of the Antichrist — 2:3b-5

"Man of sin" — This term refers to Antichrist, who is called "the beast" in Revelation. He is pictured as a man characterized by lawlessness, destined to perdition in the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20); He commits blasphemy against God and takes active steps to seat himself in the sanctuary of God and claims to be God.

Note the parallel of his ministry to that of Christ: Antichrist will be "revealed" (2:3) to the world at his "coming" (2:9); he will have a message, i.e., "a lie," that the world will believe (2:11); he demands worship (2:4); and he will have authenticating miracles (2:9). He will have Satan dwell in him at the middle of the Tribulation after he is raised from the abyss by Satan (no doubt with God's permission). Satan promotes him to be ruler of the world on his behalf for the last three and one half years of the Tribulation (Rev 13:1-5).

C. The Removal of the Divine Restrainer — 2:6-8a

"What withholds" — Or, He which "restrains." The Restrainer is the Holy Spirit. He is a Person Who has the power to hold back the activities of Antichrist so that he will not be revealed as the "man of sin" until God's time.

"Mystery of iniquity" — This phrase means the secret of lawlessness. Lawlessness will not be fully known until the Antichrist is revealed. Then lawlessness will be rampant on the earth during the Tribulation, especially during the last forty two months. It will be the most violent time that the earth has experienced since its foundation.

"He who lets will let" — This is an archaic expression. "Let" is an old word for "hinder." Before the Rapture the Holy Spirit, who "restrains," will "hinder" Antichrist's activity until He is taken away. That is, the Holy Spirit will hinder the activity of Antichrist through the true churches until they are taken away in the Rapture. The Holy Spirit will not cease His operation on the earth to save sinners that repent during the Tribulation, but His restraining ministry against Antichrist will cease at the Rapture of the Church. This implies a pre-tribulation Rapture. Antichrist will be revealed after the Rapture.

D. The Rampage and Destruction of Universal Delusion — 2:8b-12

Antichrist will work with powers, signs, and wonders (miracles) during the Tribulation. This also describes the ministry of Christ (cf. Acts 2:22; Heb 2:4).

"Them that perish" — Those who are deceived by Antichrist will perish. They are deceived because they consciously refused the "love of the truth." They are the ones who make a definite decision not to receive the Gospel of Christ. Their problem was that they loved darkness rather than light (cf. Jn 3:19). They loved the pleasures of their sin (2:12).

"Strong delusion" — Since they refuse to accept the truth, God justly allows them to be deceived, to be victimized by the error which they pursued (cf. Pro 5:22). As a result they will be judged ("damned"). A like fate awaits Antichrist when Christ returns to earth (v. 8).

II. The Consolation for the Believers — 2:13-17

2:13 — After detailing the utter hopelessness of those who persist in unrighteousness, Paul is careful to assure these believers that they were saved and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel that he preached to them.

"From the beginning" — God elected these believers in Thessalonica to be saved in eternity past (cf. Eph 1:4). He offers salvation to all (Rom 10:13), but He predestinated (elected) only those that He foreknew to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Those are the only ones that would obey His command to seek Him so He could forgive them (Isa 55:6-7).

"Chosen you" — God chooses sinners by His foreknowledge. Scripture says, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). But what did He foreknow? He knew He was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). He knew He was willing to have all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). He knew He loved all sinners (Jn 3:16) and sent His Son to be the propitiation for their sins (1 Jn 2:2).

Since God is sovereign and desires all people be saved and has provided for their salvation, why are most people not saved? He allows sinners to choose to be saved. Since sinners oppose God and will not seek Him (Rom 3:11), He seeks them and commands them to seek Him while He may be found and call on Him while He is near (Isa 55:6). This shows sinners can seek God When He seeks them. It also shows He has made a decree for sinners to seek Him. So when can they seek God and find Him? When God speaks to them through nature, through their conscience, through visions or dreams and finally through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they can seek God and find Him because He is near. He draws near to them so they can call on Him, repent of their sins and receive His gift of salvation by faith in His Son's work on the cross.

Some object and say that this is a salvation by works. No, repentance is not a work; it is a change of mind. Receiving God's gift is not a work; it is accepting the work of Christ to save him. Faith is not a work; it is confidence in God to keep His promise of eternal life to all who call on Him for salvation. When they call on Him, trusting in His promises to save them from the penalty of their sins, they will be redeemed and forgiven (2:14; Rom 10:13; Col 1:14). Since God knows all things, He foreknows those that will obey His command to call on Him for salvation. Then He will predestine them to be conformed to the image of His Son, will call them, justify them and glorify them (Rom 8:29-30). See more notes on foreknowledge and election in 1 Thessalonians 1.

2:15 — "Traditions" - The word refers to that which was handed down from Christ through Paul to the church. These are God's doctrines for the churches to obey.

2:16, 17 — The believers are exhorted to stand firm and find comfort in the One Who loves them, gives everlasting consolation, and gives good hope. God gives all of these blessings through grace.

"Chosen you" — God chooses sinners by His foreknowledge. Scripture says, "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). But what did He foreknow? We know that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). We also know that He is willing to have all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Moreover, He loved the entire world of sinners (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8), so He sent His Son to die for them and be the propitiation for their sins (1 Jn 2:2).

Since God is sovereign and desires all people be saved and has provided for their salvation, why are most people not saved? God has made a sovereign decree to have sinners repent of their sins and receive His gift of salvation by faith in His Son's work on the cross, or they can reject His gift. Some object and say that this is a salvation by works. No, repentance is not a work; it is a change of mind. Receiving God's gift is not a work; it is accepting the work of Christ to save him. Faith is not a work; it is confidence that God will keep His promise of eternal life to all who call on Him for salvation.

A sinner cannot seek God any time he wishes. However, he is commanded to seek Him while He may be found and to call on Him while He is near (Isa 55:6). When does this happen? It happens when he hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is when God is near and he can call on Him to be redeemed and forgiven (2:14; Rom 10:13; Col 1:14). God foreknows those that will call on Him, so He predestines them to be conformed to the image of His Son, calls them, justifies them and glorifies them (Rom 8:29-30).

Some theologians say He fore-loved some sinners and chose to save them but He hated other lost sinners and let them die and be punished for their sins in Hell. They say He did this in the case of Jacob and Esau before they were born, before they could do any good or bad works (Rom 9:10-13). But how does this agree with Peter's statement that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9; cf 1 Tim 2:4). The apparent error of these theologians is two-fold. First, God loves all sinners and has provided a way for them to be saved by the death of His Son to pay the penalty of their sins and by resurrection of His Son to give them eternal life (Jn 3:16; Act 13:33). Those who love their sins and reject God's gift of eternal life earn His wrath (Rom 6:23, Jn 3:36).

Second, sinners are saved by faith in God's works, not by their works. So Paul was simply eliminating the works of sinners from God's election of Jacob and non-election of Esau. Paul discusses various ways of God in dealing with sinners and finally focuses on the need to put their faith in God's works for righteousness (Rom 9:30-33).

So how do sinners obtain faith in God's works? Paul answers that question by saying, "Faith comes by hearing . . . the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Jesus said that God teaches all sinners and those that hear and learn from the Father will come to Him (Jn 6:45). Even though it never says what God foreknew that caused Him to predestine certain sinners to be like His Son, it is quite obvious that God, who knows all things, knew who would hear and learn of His requirement of faith in His word for salvation. These are the sinners that He would elect (Rom 8:29-30).

Some will object and say that sinners are spiritually dead and cannot believe unless God gives faith to the elected ones. They say that sinners cannot and will not seek God without this gift of faith. However, God never gives sinners a command that they cannot keep. When the LORD is near them, He will help them do what they normally are unable to do. Sinners are given the command, "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call on Him, while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa 55:6-7). When can sinners seek the LORD and find Him? When is the LORD near them, so they can call on Him? The answer to these two questions is the same. It is when they hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is when they can seek Him and find Him. That is when they can call on Him in faith and be saved. It is certain that God knows those who will do this. He knows all things. Since He has provided the way of salvation for them through His Son and it is His will that all sinners be saved, it is quite certain that this is what He foreknows about sinners and He chooses them to be like His Son. So God offers sinners salvation as a gift without works. Sinners can repent of their sins and receive God's gift or reject it. God elects those that receive His gift.