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Equipping End-Time Saints

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THE RISE OF ANTICHRIST

By Dr. Randy Faulkner



Antichrist woodcut by
Albrecht Durer (1493)

When I was a boy, I remember hearing some very frightening, dramatic prophetic sermons by people using a lot of sensational imagery to describe coming events in Bible prophecy. In the future judgments of the Tribulation, which the Old Testament prophets, Jesus and John the Apostle spoke about, there will arise a mysterious person of great power and influence. He will subdue nations and their leaders and he will launch, at first, a program of world unification. He will promise protection for the nation of Israel. After three and a half years, he will turn against Israel and set himself up as a god and demand to be worshipped. All who refuse to worship him will be persecuted or killed. At this time, the Jews will be harassed and murdered. Millions of those who have believed in Jesus during the Tribulation will be martyred. This powerful figure, this world dictator, is going to hate all believers in Jesus because he hates Jesus.

When I heard these sermons as a boy, I imagined this individual to be something like Superman, or some scary demonic figure like a character in a science fiction movie or a comic book. When we speak about the topic of the Antichrist, we are not using some kind of scare tactics to get you to believe on Jesus. Rather, we want to look at what the Scripture says about this future coming person, in order to understand something very important. I want to influence your world view so that you will know and believe that God is in control of history.

In II Thessalonians 2, we encounter the Antichrist, which is not a name but rather a title that is used four times in the Bible by the Apostle John. It's an accurate title because it describes his character and intentions. He is anti-Christ. He is opposed to Christ. He seeks to be a replacement Christ. He will seek to be worshipped in the place of Christ. He will be Satan's substitute messiah. Daniel calls him "the little horn." The Book of Revelation calls him "the Beast." In II Thessalonians, he is called "the man of sin" or "the man of lawlessness." Jesus referred to him when He spoke of the future "abomination of desolation." In II Thessalonians 2:1-4, the Apostle Paul writes to the suffering church at Thessalonica:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Now why do we study "the man of sin" or "the son of perdition," who is otherwise known as "the Antichrist"? We study him because Paul taught about him. What he taught is consistent with what is taught in the rest of the Bible. When Paul wrote this book to the Thessalonians, he wrote it to remind them of what he had earlier taught them. Why did he teach it? He taught it so that they would have a correct philosophy of history and believe strongly in the sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, the Antichrist, when he comes, will have power, charisma, leadership ability, and great intelligence. He will have knowledge of economics, military science, and politics. He will have great

oratorical ability. He will be shrewd and cunning and have the ability to control entire populations. He will even perform miraculous signs and wonders, and the Bible says he will get his power from Satan. But friends, know this: the Antichrist will be no match for Messiah! Jesus is Lord, and our Lord Jesus Christ has far greater power than Satan's human puppet. In fact, II Thessalonians 2:8 says, "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." He is doomed to destruction.

So I want to look at Paul's instruction to the church about the coming of Antichrist and then try to draw some implications of these teachings for ourselves. Notice especially II Thessalonians 2:5, "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" What is Paul saying? What does he want us to know about Antichrist and why does he want us to know it?

Let me start with the "why." Why does Paul want us to know these instructions? I believe it is so we will not be disturbed. I do not want you to be ". . . shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (II Thess. 2:2). Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be upset when they think about the coming of the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, the Antichrist. Don't be worried or alarmed about him. The word Paul used was about a ship that was shaken loose from its moorings because of a storm and that found itself adrift out on the ocean. Paul was saying that he does not want them to be unstable, adrift, out to sea, without guidance, loosed from their theological moorings, because of a rumor. This rumor or forged letter may have contended that the Day of the Lord had already come. Paul is writing to assure them that the Day of the Lord had not come.

What is the "Day of the Lord"? According to the Old Testament prophets, it is an extended period of time, beginning with the Tribulation, including the Second Coming of Christ to earth and extending to His 1,000-year earthly kingdom. I Thessalonians 5:2 says that it will come like ". . . a thief in the night." Paul does not want the church to be deceived by any teaching that alleges that Jesus has already come.

You will remember a few years ago the date setting preacher on the West Coast, who, with great sensationalism of radio ads and billboards, asserted that Jesus was going to return on a certain date. Of course, Jesus did not return on that date, and it caused great harm to the testimony of the church, and it causes the world to laugh and dismiss the urgency of the prophetic message. The fact is that the Bible is true and Jesus really is coming. But nobody knows the day or the hour when Jesus will come. Yes, there will be a judgment and, yes, people are accountable and will have to stand before the living God and give an account for their lives. But it is extremists that undermine the effectiveness of prophecies by setting dates and going to unwarranted extremes in their prophetic interpretation.

What is Paul's instruction and teaching here? There is certainly much more to be found regarding the Antichrist in Daniel and Revelation, but I want to look at Paul's emphasis, because he is writing as a missionary pastor to church people who are going through persecution. They are confused and fearful, and he is writing to turn their focus not so much on the Antichrist but to return their focus to Jesus Christ, their Savior and coming King. Look to Jesus, look for Jesus to come.

In his first letter, in I Thessalonians 4, Paul had written to them about the rapture of the church. There are two aspects to the coming of Jesus. The first aspect is His coming *for* the church. The second aspect has to do with Christ coming to earth *with* His church. The first of His comings is *in the air*. The second aspect is His coming to *the earth*. The first we call "the rapture." The second we call "the return." The first, the rapture, primarily has to do with the church. The second has to do with Israel and the world. What believers are looking for in this age is not the Antichrist, but the rapture, which concerns only the saved. At the rapture, Satan is not bound, but at the second coming, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss.

The rapture is described as "imminent." The second coming is preceded by "signs." There are no unfulfilled prophecies standing between the church and the rapture, while there are many signs to be fulfilled before the

second coming. So here in II Thessalonians 2 Paul is talking about what is going to happen after the rapture of the church. That is why he begins by saying, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." That's the exit or rapture of the church, the catching up of those believers who have died and those believers who are yet alive when Jesus returns. The New Testament says this event is imminent. Once these true believers are out of the way, Satan and his unholy agents will unleash a program of rebellion on the world. There is going to be a time of terrible trouble, such as the world has never seen.

This leads us to the exposure of the Antichrist. Paul states in II Thessalonians 2:3-4, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. . ." He is going to seek to be worshipped as a god.

Now the operations of the Antichrist in this age are called "the mystery of iniquity." We see this in II Thessalonians 2:7-8, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (hinders) will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." That wicked one is going to be revealed. The lawless one is going to be seen and recognized.

This lawlessness is already being seen in our world today. We read in I John 2:18 that ". . . even now are there many antichrists. . ." We know that the presence of the church is presently restraining lawlessness, as it is functioning as salt and light in the world. But when the church is removed, and the indwelling Holy Spirit is removed, Satan's secret plan will be unveiled and will be exposed. Imagine the headlines in the newspaper, "Satan's Secret Plan Exposed." His plan is to have the whole world worshipping him. As the Lord Jesus is the One through whom we worship God, so the Antichrist is the one through whom people will worship Satan.

II Thessalonians 2:4 states, "Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." Antichrist will be the one through whom people worship Satan. In Matthew 24:24 Jesus said, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." We read in II Thessalonians 2:9, "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders." Antichrist is going to cause people to believe "the lie" with his lying wonders. We read in II Thessalonians 2:11, "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

What is that great lie that Satan will cause people to believe? I believe it is that same lie that Satan presented to Eve: ". . . ye shall be as gods. . ." (Genesis 3:5). Satan himself said, ". . . I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:14). People are still trying to exchange the truth of God for a lie. What is that lie? You can be your own god! You don't have to worship the living and true God, the Creator. You don't have to bow before Him. You can make yourself like the most High. The lie of Satan is what people are believing today. This is a great falling away, a great rebellion, from the truth. The Bible word for this is "apostasy." That is the word Paul used in II Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

There will be a spiritual declension. The man of sin, the lawless one, the son of perdition, is going to be the embodiment of all this lawless rebellion against God and His Christ. He will be the very personification of the lie, and he will come to power in the days of the Tribulation in the future. This is the inspired instruction of the Apostle of Jesus Christ! This is what will happen! Paul doesn't give us this instruction to make us afraid of the future. He doesn't give it to us to make us depressed or sad. Far from it! He wants us to be encouraged! That's why he writes in II Thessalonians 2:16-17, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

What is the application to our lives today? What is Paul saying to us? What shall we do with this truth about the coming of this man of lawlessness? First of all, I believe we should worship the sovereign God. I find it very interesting in Revelation 17:17 where it speaks there of Antichrist and other world rulers. It says there that “. . . God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will. . .” I find that utterly amazing. God’s will is going to be fulfilled, even in the activities of the Antichrist. God causes even the wrath of man to praise Him! John Walvoord said, “This is part of God’s sovereign purpose, to bring evil leaders into judgment.” Worship the sovereign God! His Spirit’s power, in this church age, is holding back the Antichrist until “. . . he might be revealed in his time” (II Thess. 2:6). Just as Jesus’ first coming was in “the fulness of the time” (Gal 4:4), so will be His second coming. God even uses, much to our surprise, the strategies of Satan and the Antichrist, for His own purposes. He sends a strong delusion on people who have already rejected and denied Him. The Devil thinks he is working out his purposes through the Antichrist’s deceptions and counterfeit miracles and his attempts to imitate Christ using all kinds of occult power, but in doing so Satan is going to discover that he has been working God’s sovereign will all along.

Romans 1:24 says that God will give them over to their own willful blindness, and those who follow the Antichrist, who choose wickedness and falsehood and Satan’s deception, will be given over to the lie that they themselves have chosen, and they will be condemned. You can read about it in the book of Revelation or Romans 1. We worship, rather, the sovereign God.

Secondly, as we seek to apply this teaching to ourselves, we want to anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ. II Thessalonians 2:8 speaks of “. . . the brightness of his coming.” According to God’s Word, Antichrist is already doomed to destruction even before he appears on the scene. He’s going to be blinded by his own lust for power, and the adulation of the masses. He won’t read the Bible, and if he does, he won’t understand these prophecies. He will think that somehow he is a law unto himself. He will think he can persecute the Jews or those who have trusted Christ during the Tribulation, as we see in Revelation 7. He will have many of them killed, he will control the economy of the world, he will attempt to unite the nations around himself, he will command everyone to worship him, but this will not be allowed to go on. These evil days will be shortened. Jesus will return to the earth with His people with power and great glory. He will take Antichrist prisoner. He will overthrow Babylon, the Antichrist’s empire. He will throw the Devil into the abyss, and this will be the climax of that great battle of Armageddon at the end of the seven year period of the Tribulation. So look forward to Jesus’ coming. Don’t be anxious, don’t be fearful, and don’t be troubled.

Thirdly, read, study, and welcome the Word of God. Treat this message as an invitation from God. Do not treat this message recklessly. Do not harden your heart. If there is a desire for truth in your heart, that is the Holy Spirit drawing you to know God. That is the Holy Spirit’s call. If there is a desire to be united in faith with Jesus Christ, and have him as your Savior and Lord, reject Satan’s lies and humble yourself before God and trust Jesus Christ. Believe His gospel! Paul said in II Thessalonians 2:14 that God calls you by His gospel. As you read this, the gospel is going out to you. We are commanded in Scripture to believe the gospel, to obey the gospel. We are not commanded in Scripture to watch for the coming of Antichrist. We are to watch for the coming of Christ. Place your faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. Acts 4:12 says, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” We are not commanded to speculate about the identity of Antichrist. Many people have made attempts to try to identify the man of lawlessness as some present, living, world leader. What we need to do is resist the attraction of sensationalism and extremism and focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to get the gospel to as many people as we can in the time that we have so that they will be saved before that great day of God’s wrath comes on the earth, and the Antichrist launches his terrible program against the people of Christ during the Tribulation. Oh, my friend, wherever you are and whatever you are doing right now, let me encourage you to trust Jesus. One day Jesus is going to destroy the Antichrist “. . . with the spirit of his mouth” (II Thess. 2:8). He is going to destroy him like the blast of a furnace with the splendor of His coming. Amen.

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