

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class: "What Will the End of the World Be Like?"

II. New Testament Passages

D. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 (*continued*)

Verse 4: **What will this "man of lawlessness" do?**

**"oppose and exalt himself over _____ that is called
_____"**

"sets himself up in God's _____"

"proclaiming himself to be _____"

Paul's description here uses language similar to that Daniel uses in his end-times visions (7:25; 8:9ff; 11:36ff.). The man of lawlessness exalts himself over both true Christian faith and false, man-made, idolatrous religion. He does not only oppose God, but sets himself above God. This "man of lawlessness" must be first of all. It is clear that an important feature of the resurgence of evil in the last days will be the attempt to dethrone God.

"temple"- in AD 40 the Roman emperor Caligula tried to set up an image of himself in the temple of Jerusalem. This attempt was frustrated only by his death. It aroused widespread horror among the Jews. While Paul may have had this in mind, what this "man of lawlessness" will do goes beyond an image of himself, but in person taking God's place. While the temple was still standing as Paul wrote this, it would be destroyed within twenty years. Was Paul aware of this prophecy of Jesus from Matthew 24? Could "temple" stand for more than just a building in Jerusalem? Is it a building elsewhere that represents the presence of God? The temple's purpose has been fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. Its promise of God's presence for the forgiveness of His people's sins has been replaced by the Word and Sacrament ministry of the Holy Christian Church.

"When the man of sin would succeed in exalting himself in this way, the result would be that he would rule especially in the Christian church as the equal of God himself...When in later years the love for God's Word would grow cold in the church, then God would allow the Antichrist to come into full bloom and exalt himself in the hearts of people" (David Kuske, Thessalonians, Northwestern, 1984, pages 91 and 93).

"Church Fathers believed to Antichrist would be a successor to the Roman Empire. During the medieval period, some Franciscans and other theologians asserted strongly that the pope was the Antichrist. Others saw the coming of the Antichrist in the attacks of the Muslim Turks. The Lutheran Confession describe the papal and Islamic doctrines as 'marks of Antichrist' and express that the Antichrist will manifest himself as an authority over the Church at the end of time" (Lutheran Study Bible, 2006, page 2062).

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

Verse 5: In the Book of Acts it would appear that Paul was able to stay in Thessalonica only a short while, no more than a month (Acts 17:1-9) before being driven out of town by the jealousy of the Jews. However, from Paul's letters to the church there, he was either there longer than that, or was able to squeeze in a lot of instruction in a short time. His teaching of the faith to them included lessons about the work of this "man of lawlessness." He calls to their memory what he had told them when he was with them. Notice the emphasis on the first person singular. Paul stresses that it was he himself who taught this to them.

Verses 6-7: Paul speaks of this "man of lawlessness" as already being present in the world, but that he is being restrained or held back for awhile by something (neuter). Since his readers know what this is, Paul does not describe it further or go into details, so we are left to speculate at his meaning. However, in the next sentence Paul uses the same verb but in the masculine to refer to "the one who now holds it back." Suggestions include the Roman government, or the general principle of law and order that government in general represents (e.g. police activities in the news throughout the nation recently), the Holy Spirit, the Word of God or Jesus Himself. "But the plain fact is that we do not know, and it seems best honestly to admit the fact, and not to try to force the passage into conformity with some particular theory which has been evolved on the basis of imperfect knowledge" (Leon Morris, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Eerdmans, 1983, page 130).

"At the proper time"- Whatever or whomever is holding this "man of lawlessness" in check, his revelation is under God's control and will be according to God's timetable. No wickedness can overstep the bounds God has appointed for it. Evil will never pass beyond its limits. God's purpose finally be effected.

"secret power"- The Greek word is musterion but is not the idea of "mystery" that we have. In the Bible this word means a secret which we could never fathom or solve, but can only be understood by us through God's special revelation of His Word (e.g. that Jew and Gentile are both saved only through Christ).

Verse 8: Paul gives us no details of the activity of the "man of lawlessness" but deals with his destruction immediately after his appearing. The full outing of the "man of lawlessness" will take place only when Jesus returns. Jesus will overthrow this one by the "breath of His mouth." (This phrase appears only here in the New Testament.) In Greek the pneuma can be translated by "spirit, wind or breath." This is the Word of Christ, of which the Holy Spirit is the preeminent preacher. "God's Word held the Antichrist in check until the Christian church slowly by surely lost its love for that Word" (Kuske, page 95).

What does current participation in Bible class tells us about the church's love for God's Word today? _____

In original usage "splendor" has the idea of a striking appearance. It was often used by the Greeks of a glorious manifestation of the gods. It is the Greek word from which we get our English "epiphany." "Coming" is parousia which is used in all of its six New Testament occurrences to refer to Christ's appearing (once to His first advent and five times to His second).