

## *“The Parousia of God” Pt 3*

### **2 Thessalonians - More About the End Times**

2 Thessalonians 2

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**.Jeff:** Our Father in heaven, we are thankful for this day and for the blessing of life in Christ. Father, as we gather before You we are mindful that that life in Christ is only made possible because of Your sovereign grace. And so Father, as we come we are cognizant of the fact that we stand before You as forgiven sinners and yet more than that—righteous in Your sight by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ because You are gracious and kind to sinners. And so Father, as we come we come remembering that You are good. And we ask, Lord, that we would be imitators of You, that we would be good—good to those with whom we come into contact.

We pray that we would be godly and righteous. We pray, Father, that You would use us for good in Your kingdom. And we pray that, Lord, not only with those with whom we have to do in terms of our ministries, whether they be foreign missions or even domestic, or even ministries of the church. But we pray that we would be found good and righteous and godly in our own homes and with those closest to us. Lord,. Forgive us where we fail in that, for it is easiest at home to fail. And so Lord, we pray that You’ll forgive us and that You’ll enable us to have the determination to stand back up and move forward in our walk with you as we walk with You among others.

Father, we think about those who are sick and those who are ailing, those who are struggling in this life. We think about our brother Kevin. We ask that You would minister to him. We’re thankful for his faith. We pray that You would surround him with brothers and sisters. But Lord, as things complicate with his wife’s surgery we ask that You’ll minister to them both. We ask that You’ll meet their needs and supply everything that they have need of in these days. And Lord, we know that You are more than able to do that. But we also know that You’re more than able to provide them with contentment in whatever situation they find themselves in, and so we pray that You would.

We pray, Father, for Brad with the loss of his sister. We pray that You will minister to him, and what a difficult loss that is with someone so young. And so we pray that Your Spirit would be in the midst of that, healing wounds. We also pray, Father, for this woman whose grandson is in need of surgery. We ask that You would intervene there. And we pray, Father, that You would guide and lead the doctors’ hands as they operate.

And Father, we pray that even as we continue and probably will continue to miss our brother the bishop, we just ask that You’ll minister to us in our loss. Help us to not grieve as those who have no hope. And yet, Father, the loss is real, even as we walk to the barn. We remember how John used to park his car right next to the building and walk in. And it’s a painful thing to not see his car and to know that it’s not going to be there. And yet we pray, Lord, that You will comfort us. Again, help us to grieve not as those who have no hope, but as those who have hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, and to remember that our Christ was the Messiah of our brother John. So Father, we ask that You’ll minister.

And Father, we pray that You’ll bless us today as we gather together. And we ask that You will minister to us through Your word. Father, we’re dealing with a topic that is often debatable and disputable among brothers and sisters. And so Lord, we pray that where we

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can find commonality we would, but most of all where we can find hope and refreshment we would. And we pray it in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** All right. Let me refresh your memories, even as we start here today. We’re in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians, and we’re looking at the man of lawlessness. Now let me remind you that the man of lawlessness fits into an eschatological plan. It fits into the purpose of God. And when we think about that fittedness in the plan and purpose of God we think about the last days. And you remember that I said to you that the last days really begin with the ascension of Christ into heaven, and they persist until the last.

Now the eschatological calendar in the end gets a little fuzzy. And I explained some of that to you the last time. There seems to be this rebellion that is to come, wherein Satan is going to be released and allowed to deceive the nations yet one more time. There is going to be a manifestation of the man of lawlessness or the antichrist, and then the end will come. And that end will bring with it the general judgment. This is what we find in 1 Thessalonians 4—that Christ will come. And in that coming He will come in the air. We’ll rise up to meet Him.

And I think I’ve explained this to you to some degree before. This is really a mid-Eastern custom. You know, if you have a city here and you have the city gates here, and some dignitary is coming in, if you have mountains and you have valleys, depending on the importance of that dignitary these are filled in and these are made low, and the road is straightened. And the people come outside the city in order to meet the dignitary and usher him back in. And that’s the idea.

When Christ comes from heaven it will be in the twinkling of an eye according to 1 Corinthians 15. And the dead in Christ will rise. We will be changed, and we will meet Him in the air and usher Him back down to the earth. In other words, the new Jerusalem will descend. He’ll bring the new creation to bear at that moment. And in that moment there will be a general judgment. Those who stand in Christ will be vindicated by Christ. And those who are not in Christ will be judged and cast along with Satan and hell into the lake of fire eternally.

So at that moment there’s going to be this general judgment, this change in the constitution of the earth, and so on. But that said, these things are debatable, and as I said in my prayer they are disputable. And yet this is all part of the eschatological calendar. Here we’re asking, what about that time before the end? So we’re talking about the man of lawlessness.

Now I said to you at one point that the man of lawlessness was already manifest, or it at least feels like he is already manifest at different times throughout every age. And I said that to you because I want you to understand that we should feel like the antichrist is among us, because the spirit of antichrist is among us. He’s among us in his deceitfulness. And so it always feels like every age is dealing with the man of lawlessness, with the antichrist. And that’s right.

But the question is, when will he really manifest himself? And I said to you that in the rebellion he will either be lifted up or he will give rise to the rebellion. It’s really not exactly clear as to which will come first: the chicken or the egg.

And so that takes us up to where we are now. And I just want to talk to you again about the man of lawlessness. And I want to hopefully finish this off today. But what I

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want to say to you is that we left off last time thinking about this rebellion. And in thinking about the rebellion we asked the question. Is the rebellion a political rebellion, or is it a religious rebellion? And you know, I have a tendency to think that we think more about the rebellion as if it were an ecclesiastical or theological rebellion. That is, the true gospel is going to be cast off, and there is going to be this remnant of the church left throughout the world. That may be the case, and there may be something to that. I think that there are other texts that actually kind of point out the truth of that.

But on the other hand is this text teaching an ecclesiastical or theological rebellion? Or is there a political rebellion at root here? Or is there in some sense a both/and: a religious and a political (rebellion)? That is to say that the political and the religious have become so intertwined that one can't distinguish between the two?

And so that leads us to that idea of what type of man the man of lawlessness will be. And obviously the answer to that is that he is going to be a lawless man. I think that's really an important observation when you think about it, because when you think about the man of lawlessness, one of the things that we're going to be thinking about is who this person is and who the restrainer is. So before we start to think about who this man is and who the restrainer is that restrains him, let's give a little thought to a passage outside of 2 Thessalonians. Let's think about Revelation 12 and 13. And there we find an interesting set of texts.

In Revelation 12 and 13 we find that there are a number of beasts. And maybe I should tell you this before we get started, and I think I will. If you look at the book of Revelation how do you understand it? Do you understand the book of Revelation as you open it up and then it goes chronologically where you can find that here's what happens at this point in the future, and then a couple chapters later this is a little further in the future, and then a couple chapters later this is a little further in the future? Is it a chronological book? Or is it laid out differently in some way than what we're normally used to thinking about when we read it—a novel, let's say?

And I think it is. I think it's laid out in what we call seven recapitulations. In other words, when you look at the book of Revelation you break it up into seven different sections. And those seven sections recapitulate the previous section or sections from a different angle or perspective.

So for instance I'm going to give you just a general breakdown. But section 1 generally goes from 1:1 to where you get to chapter 3, at the end of chapter 3. Now that's the first section.

Now if we're thinking about Revelation 1-3 from that recapitulation standpoint, then one of the things we realize is that we are being told about the last days from the perspective of the seven churches. Now think about that. The seven churches; seven is a perfect or whole number. And so when you think about the seven churches you think about them from the perspective of the church in the last days. So that's the first telling of the book of Revelation.

Now think about that. We're not going to spend time here today. But these letters are broken up into a very, very structured sense. In other words you have three and then three, and then a middle culminating letter; it's very fascinating. But the point is that this is a highly structured series of letters that speaks to the church about problems that the church will face in every age. So the first section is from the church's perspective.

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The second section goes from chapter 4 to the end of chapter 7. Now I want you to think about this. We find in chapters 4 and 5 that you immediately go up into the heavens. And you immediately find that the Lamb that looks as if it has been slain is the One who is able to take from the scroll of God’s hand, and is able to unfurl it. And as He does this Lamb has the scroll in its hooves. And I’m doing this because I want you to see that this is all symbolic, right? This is not a lamb pulling the wax seals off the scroll. This is imagery of the Lord Jesus who takes the scroll of eternity, of all history, and opens it as He takes off each of the wax seals and takes them off. And each seal becomes something that will be fateful for the earth.

Now one of the things that we learn is that not only is there a recapitulation or a retelling of the previous section from another perspective, but there is also an intensification that takes place. So one of the things that we learn is that only a portion of the earth will be affected, and it’s a rather small portion. And what are we supposed to understand? We’re supposed to understand that with the going forward of history there is an intensification of judgment that leads up to the climactic moment.

So there’s a retelling from what perspective? From the heavenly perspective. In other words, the church looks as if it’s in distress. But God is seated on His throne and is the Master of all history. And so this second section retells our story from the church’s last days—the Ascension into heaven until the Second Coming of Christ—from God’s perspective. And He has it all under control.

Now when you get to the end of chapter 7, notice what you have. You find all of these saints who are up in heaven. And they’re pictured as the Israel of God. And yet we’re given a number—144,000. And yet right after that we see that gathered around the throne is “a great multitude; more than I can count. I didn’t even know their number.” In other words, what he’s giving us is this Old Testament picture of the church present before God’s throne. This is the Israel of God. And guess what? The figure is symbolic: not 144,000, but a great multitude, more than anyone can count. And they are gathered before the throne of God.

And guess what? Then the end comes. Once the true Israel is gathered before God, the end comes to the earth. So it’s a lot of this general judgment stuff. God gathers His people and the end comes; the wicked are judged.

Then section 3, chapter 8. And this third section goes to the end of chapter 11. And here we find the seventh seal. The seventh seal gives birth to the seven trumpets.

Now one of the things that we realize is, if we can say it this way, the sealing of the saints is now compared to the destruction of the wicked. And what we find here in all of these trumpets is the wicked being tormented and the torment that they inflict upon the earth.

But notice this. Notice that in chapter 11 that there are two witnesses. These two witnesses represent the church. And the church will give its testimony. And what will happen to them? The world will kill them; the world will put them to death. In other words, here is a picture of the church’s demise as it were. In other words this is what is going to happen to the church. The world is going to trample it underfoot.

And yet notice this. The beautiful thing about it is that God will harvest this earth, and then He will bring judgment upon the wicked at the end of chapter 11. And so here again, just as we found at the end of the previous section, as we found an end so now we find

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another end. And so the righteous are with God and the wicked are judged before things finish.

What perspective is this? This perspective is the perspective that tells us that the wicked will be allowed to be wicked. And they will inflict everything that is on the earth, and this is the effect that it will have upon the church. But do not fear; God is still on His throne, in control of history. And the righteous will be saved and the wicked will be judged. In other words, what we have in this retelling is not something that we don't already know. The revelation is not a mystery that is unlocked with the key of history as we see Russia and China and so on unfold in their wickedness. What we see in the book of Revelation is the retelling of things we already know.

Now that takes us to the fourth section, and that's the section that we're looking at now. The fourth section is chapter 12 to the end of chapter 14. Now here we find the beasts. How many beasts? We find three beasts. Now we're going to look at those three beasts. But what I want you to notice is this. Go to chapter 14. And here in chapter 14 we find the 144,000 again—that is, the church complete. What do you find? You find the harvest of the earth and then you find the end. The wicked will be trampled underfoot and the blood will be up to the bridle of the horse.

That's the end! In other words, we've had three ends already in the book of Revelation. We're going to come back to the beasts in just a minute. Let me just point out the rest of the sections.

Section five is in 15, and that goes through 16. And again, here we have the seven plagues, and this gives rise to the seven bowls. And then we're going to find in section 6 at the start of chapter 17 that this goes to the end of chapter 19. And this is going to tell us about the city. I'm going to say a couple more words as we go along, so I'm just going to pass over these rather quickly.

Then chapter 20 to the end of the book of Revelation is the seventh section. So there are seven retellings. And I already told you about chapter 20. Again this is the millennial period which starts with the ascension of Christ and goes to His Second Coming, where we find the little rebellion of Satan at the end, and then the end will come.

And then what will happen? What will happen is that the New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven, and so forth. So what about these beasts? Let's go back to them for a minute in chapter 12 and chapter 13.

In chapter 12 and 13 what do we find? I'll tell you what we find: we find an unholy trinity; that's what we find. We find Satan who is (like) the Father; he is the dragon. We find the water beast who is like the Son. And we find the earth beast who is like the Spirit.

Now why these things? Notice a few things here. In chapter 12 here we have the serpent. And he seeks to devour as the Old Testament church gives birth to the Messiah. But the Messiah is saved, and so too are His people, the church. And they flee into the wilderness. It's in the wilderness where the church is said to exist. And this is Satan; he's the one who is accusing the brethren.

And then look at the first beast. The first beast has this sense in which he's been resurrected. He receives a mortal wound, and yet he lives. That's the son, right? It's a replication of the Son.

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Notice then that the second beast, or the third beast in what we’re looking at,—the beast out of the earth,—he’s the propagandist. In other words, he seeks to bring glory to the beast out of the sea. Incidentally, the beast comes out of the sea. What is the sea? The sea is the peoples and the masses upon which the sun sits.

How do we know that? Well, look in chapter 17. In chapter 17 we learn this. *“Come, and I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on the many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality.”* So the peoples over which kings rule are the waters upon which this harlot sits. And this second beast rises out of the sea, out of the people. And that’s the idea; he comes up from among the people. And that’s why I said to you that it always feels like the antichrist is among us. Why? Because he is among us in terms of his deceitfulness. The spirit of antichrist is always among us as he rises out from the mass of sinful humanity.

Now when you think about this you think to yourself, what we have here is this unholy trinity. But what we also have is an unholy city in chapter 17. So in the book of Revelation we have a holy Trinity and we have a new Jerusalem, a holy city. So in the book of Revelation we have an unholy trinity and an unholy city. And the idea is that throughout the age God will always be replicated by the antichrist, in other words by the one who tries to set himself in the place of Christ instead of Christ, over against Christ.

And so the whole of the millennium, or the last days—however you want to say it,—the whole of this will be characterized by a battle between God—the Trinitarian God—and the unholy trinity of Satan and the antichrist and the spirit of propaganda that seeks to exalt him. I’m going to say more about this, but I want to just stop. I’ve given you a ton, and I have a feeling that I’ve just rambled on. And you’ve not sought to stop me.

*(Laughter)* So what questions do you have? What would you like to explore?

**Gary Dunbar:** Is there going to be a quiz?

**Brave Man:** When are the last days exactly?

**Jeff:** When is there going to be a quiz? *(Laughter)* Is that right? When is the last day?

*(Laughter)* Are you serious?

**Brave Man:** I’m writing it down.

**Jeff:** Oh, no! Actually you can put “today” down. *(Laughter)* And you can fill it in until eternity, right?

**Ted Wood:** Jeff, are you especially wed to the understanding that Satan is the counterpart of the Father, and that the water beast is the counterpart of the Son? Are you wed to the water beast being the counterpart of the Son versus the counterpart of the Spirit? I haven’t studied this at all, and what you’re sharing is absolutely fascinating; I want to keep it fresh in my mind. But water and the Spirit go together as images.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Water can also be the Word in that image.

**Jeff:** Yep.

**Ted:** And the Word would seem to be the Son in the Incarnation.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** I’m just wondering. And you talked about what comes out of the sea.

**Jeff:** So I gave the wrong text. It’s in 17. But here’s why I view the waters as people. It’s in verse 15. *“And the angel said to me, ‘The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.’”* So am I wedded to

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this idea? As wedded as I can be. I mean, this isn't like the Trinity, right? I'm wedded to the Trinity in the sense that I'm going to the stake for it.

I don't see other alternatives that are good. Here's why. The son who rises out of the water, out of the people, the antichrist rises up out of the society. He appears to be one who has died and has come back to life, and so he seems to be more like the Son. So let me show you that, because I just said that.

But if you look in chapter 13, notice that it says,--

**Ted:** Verse 3.

**Jeff:** Is it 3? Yeah. *“One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound. But its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.”*

Oftentimes those who see this as Nero will talk about “Nero Revivodus”—Nero revived; Nero resurrected. And they'll say that here is this mortal wound, and yet Nero lives.

Now let me tell you; here's a fascinating thing, okay?: The fascinating thing is that I don't doubt that Nero could be in the mind of the human author as he writes this text—no doubt at all. Why? Because Nero claims divinity. He's a political ruler who claims to be divine. This kind of matches up with what we saw earlier when we tried to look at the character of the man of lawlessness. So here's a man who is both political and religious; he seems to be an antichrist.

The interesting thing is, there's a book out about Nero's life, but it's not a biography. It's really a book about his influence and the influence he had over the years after his rule. We have a tendency to read about Nero and think, Nero is bad; Nero is bad! Why? Because he burned Christians, he put them in the arena, he accused them falsely of having burned Rome.

However, Nero in the eyes of the populace was not bad. In fact Nero was very much loved after his death, and many thought that he would actually return. In fact it was like an Elvis deal that surrounded Nero. *(Laughter)* No, I'm not kidding. There were many in the first century who believed that Nero would return. There were Nero sightings. He had a guitar. *(Laughter)* Now listen to me; I'm telling you. There was a statue of Nero that someone—and history claims not to know who it was—but continued to keep this statue of Nero cloaked for many, many years after Nero's death.

And here's the other fascinating thing. The other fascinating thing is that emperors after Nero would actually take Neronian busts and they would have their faces carved into the Neronian bust, not because they were short on materials, but because they wanted to catch a little bit of the wave. They wanted to be re-cast in Neronian form. And so they would have their faces carved into a Neronian bust. And so Nero was a very popular person after his death. He was kind of feared and hated by many in terms of his life. But once he died, for some reason he becomes this legendary figure.

And it's quite contrary to how the Christians felt about him in the first century. But the point is, if this was written in the '90s and Nero dies in the mid-'60s, I have no doubt that in the human author's mind that Nero becomes an antichrist. In fact—and this is a fascinating thing—what you find is, you find text of the New Testament that doesn't have the number of man in it written as 666, but 616 because that was Nero's number. And Tertullian in the mid-second century deals with that. He said that this is just somebody trying to make Nero fit into the antichrist. So he calls it out.

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But the point is, that was alive and well. So the populace loved him. Christians hated him and saw him as the antichrist; not an antichrist, but some saw him as the antichrist. So I submit that it can be the Satan. The beast out of the sea is Satan trying to replicate the Son. And here the New Testament author John seems to be using Nero as something like the Son. Hold on, Don. Go ahead.

**John Gratner:** Just to take this in a crazy direction, doesn't he have an issue, that being Satan? He keeps trying to make this antichrist, but they keep dying. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** So we're talking about something that we can't see. We're talking about something that is not human. Jesus healed the demoniacs. He cast them out. They go into the pigs and the pigs go over the cliff, and they die. And then we forget about those demons. Where did they go?

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** So could it be that the accuser Satan has this problem? He keeps being the antichrist, right? But Nero dies. Is Nero controlled or inhabited by his power? His power had stopped, right? So I'm not thinking that you'll answer; I'm simply saying that we're not talking about just humans.

**Jeff:** That's right.

**John:** I'm not saying somehow that Nero was actually divine. But was he talking to someone that was? And by "divine" I don't mean divine like the Most High God. But we talk about angels at Christmas and we never talk about them at any other time, right? Maybe there is a line, if you will.

**Jeff:** I love the parallel; that's a great parallel: that the antichrists are like the pigs. And the demons inhabit them and make use of them, but they don't last. And so it kind of gives a nice picture to this idea that John talks about: that there are many antichrists who have already come. You know that the antichrist is here in the sense that his spirit is here.

**John:** Because Jesus doesn't have this problem.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** He did die.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** And He did rise again.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** And He lives forever to rule and reign.

**Jeff:** And you know, this raises something that we talked about last time and is worth saying again. And that is that the church goes through all kinds of things. You know, right now the church is going through the throes of difficulty as it stresses about the government and what the government is going to do. Who wouldn't, right? But the tendency is what? The tendency is to find that thing that will counteract or combat the government, right? So a lot of people are reaching for theonomy or any number of things that they believe will be sort of a direct challenge to the way government is today, when in fact what we really need to remember is that the church was always being persecuted; there's the first section of Revelation. And in the second section of Revelation God is always on His throne governing history. And so none of this—none of what is happening right now—is outside of the plan and purpose of God.



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But the difficulty is living through it, you know? And I think it takes wisdom and patience and trust, absolute trust in the sovereign God who is, and who works all things according to His purposes and so on. Ted, did you want to return to anything?

**Ted:** There is so much to think about.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** I appreciate it.

**Jeff:** Does anybody have anything else that you want to flesh out or talk about for a second?

**Don Maurer:** Why did the Romans love Nero after his death?

**Jeff:** I don't know; go figure, right?

**Ted:** Nero's reign is kind of divided into two parts. In the first half of his reign he was quite beloved, and he was seen as a person who would restore some of the public and really Roman virtues.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** There is reason to believe that he had mental illness problems in the second half of his reign. But that was mostly inflicted on his own family and inner court where the populace didn't see it. So he was a very popular emperor. I can see everything you're saying, especially in the first half of his reign.

**Jeff:** Yes. Go ahead.

**Don Bishop:** There were people who loved Hitler.

Yes, that's right.

**Brave Men:** He made Volkswagens. *(Laughter)*

**Don Bishop:** He called it “the people's car.”

**Jeff:** Okay. Anything else? *(Laughter)* All right, let's move on for just a minute. One of the things that I want to put in front of you is like father, like son, right? So we should not be surprised to find that Jesus says to the religious leaders that “you lie, and your father is the father of lies.” And that spirit of deception that characterizes the antichrist and all that he does, and the spirit that rises out of the earth, and the propagandist spirit that tries to bring glory to this antichrist is a liar and a deceiver. So we shouldn't be surprised to find that this is the spirit that motivates.

The question that I think we ought to be asking is, what and who is the restrainer? Now that's an interesting question when you think about it. And the answers that are given are numerous. Let me give you just some of these.

The Roman Empire is one candidate. Think about that. The Roman Empire restrains the antichrist from emerging, and the rebellion from coming. That's one answer.

Civil order is another. God the Holy Spirit is another. Satan himself is offered as an answer to the question of who is the restrainer. That's odd; I find that to be the oddest one. And then the gospel is (said to be) the restrainer.

Now you know, when I look at this list—and there are others; I've only given you a few—but when I look at this list, and when I think about what I said to you thus far about the man of lawlessness, I'll tell you my own inclination. My own inclination is not to see the restrainer as God the Holy Spirit. And the reason for that is this. For instance, in an extreme dispensational position the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way. And the question that I have is how then can anyone be saved when the Holy Spirit is removed? Now some

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dispensationalists have told me that this doesn't mean that He doesn't have a saving role anymore; it just means that he doesn't have a restrain role. I don't understand that.

But my own view is that He is—

**Ted:** What is it? What is it?

**Jeff:** Did you notice that I didn't put it up there? No, I'm just kidding. I'll tell you what my own view is. My own view is that I see the man of lawlessness as restrained by law. So if you wanted to say civil order, if you wanted to say natural law and God's law, and put those two in the same basket, I would say that the thing that restrains is law.

For instance, think about it like this. Let's say, for instance, that he is a political leader who adopts a divine character. What is a political leader to do? There is a very low bar set for political leaders, a low bar. I mean, think about it: reward good, punish bad. I can't think of a lower bar than that.

The question is, how do you know what is good and how do you know what is bad? Well go figure, but I think natural law tells you a little bit about what's good and what's bad, right? Think about it. You know, C.S. Lewis did this in *The Abolition of Man*.

He said, think of the *tao*. He called the *tao* the moral code for all societies.

**Ted:** The *Tao*, as in t-a-o?

**Jeff:** Yes, t-a-o. Think about the moral code for all societies. He says that murder is wrong. And guess what? You don't need a written law from the Scriptures to tell you that. It's written on the heart of every individual. Stealing is wrong; it's written on the heart of every individual, right? On and non you can find these things in natural law.

But guess what? There is a moral code written in the law of God that is there as well.

But think about it. I don't need to know from the Scriptures that certain things are right and that certain things are wrong. Certain things ought to be punished and certain things ought to be rewarded. For instance, I want you to think about what's going on, right? People can talk about the imbalances in the law all they want to. But when you talk about emptying prisons out, or when you talk about no-cash bail and holding nobody, and there are repeat offenders and repeat offenders and repeat offenders, and nobody seems to be doing anything about it, that to me is lawlessness. And so the man of lawlessness gets the center stage because lawlessness reigns. The law as a restrainer has been removed.

And so you can put that scenario in any number of ways. But in my mind the law—whether you define it as natural law, which is God's law, or as the moral code which is God's law—no matter how you define it, it's God's law. And when that is removed or taken out of the way, or is self-restrained, lawlessness comes to the fore. My own view is that it's law that is the restrainer. But I am open to being pushed back on that.

You asked about my commitment to the beast's identity? My commitment to this one is probably a little less than that one.

**Don Maurer:** This and that referring to what?

**Jeff:** The restrainer's identity versus the antichrist's identity and the beast out of the sea. Okay?

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Kirk? Good to see you, Kirk.

**Kirk Ellerbusch:** Thank you. I'm assuming that you're talking about the restrainer in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

### ***“The Parousia of God” Pt 3***

**Kirk:** *“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He”*—He, the pronoun,--*He is taken out of the way.*” How do you make a pronoun a law?

**Jeff:** So if you look, one of those pronouns is He and one of those pronouns is a neuter; it’s an it. And some translations will translate it as He. But the fact is that there is a neuter pronoun in there, and there is a masculine pronoun in there. So when you look at it the question is, is the neuter pronoun indicative of a collective group?

The way I look at it is this. I look at it as the antichrist (being) a collective group. Many antichrists have come, and one antichrist will come. So it’s a collective group and there is one antichrist.

But when you look at the restrainer look at verse 7. *“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.”* And I can’t remember which one of those is—

**Kirk:** Are you reading out of the ESV?

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Don Maurer:** In the New King James the He is capitalized.

**Jeff:** Yes. And that’s an interpretation as well.

**Don:** Right.

**Jeff:** Don’t worry. With this group I’m always being tested, and that’s fine. *(Laughter)* I’m working at it.

**Ted:** It says here in the Greek, *“For the mystery is working already of lawlessness, only the one restraining it at present until out of the midst he may be gone.”*

**Don Maurer:** The one?

**Ted:** Yes, the one. It’s the, which implies the something—the it, the he, the she.

**Kirk:** What’s hard here is that the natural reading seems to imply a person.

**Ted:** Yes. But even with that it could be an idea personified. You know, we speak about liberty as Lady Liberty.

**Jeff:** Actually it’s interesting, because lawlessness is feminine as well. Did you notice that?

**Ted:** No, I didn’t know that.

**Jeff:** So here’s the thing; I would say this to you. The thing is that the Greek is not going to decide it. I think you have an interpretation going when it’s a he. And I don’t have any problem with saying it’s he. But I think that what it’s saying is that it’s personifying, (the way) you might personify a nation. Babylon is not a collection of people; it’s either he or she. So that happens. But this is—

**Kirk:** The only question I might have then if it is law, as you said, why didn’t Paul simply say “until law is taken out of the way?” That would have been far clearer.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Why didn’t he identify the restrainer though? Do you know what I mean? Why did he just call it the restrainer? I mean, he could have said—

**Kirk:** It’s hard for me because I only have the English translation.

**Jeff:** Sure. But even if you just have that we have “he.” But who is the he?

**Kirk:** Right. Paul doesn’t seem to identify him specifically. But the pronoun seems to point to the Holy Spirit because He is a Person.

**Jeff:** Yeah, but the difficulty—

**Kirk:** God is sovereign and in control.

**Jeff:** Mm-hmm.

### ***“The Parousia of God” Pt 3***

**Kirk:** And he has a timetable for all this. Who can control the antichrist or restrain the antichrist or lawlessness except the Holy Spirit?

**Jeff:** Yes, but here’s the trouble. So I think I was thinking about this. I started answering you about the antichrist. When I look at verse 7 there are no pronouns here in the Greek. Every pronoun that is here is coming out of and is being inserted because of what’s in the Greek. So for instance there are no pronouns here.

**Kirk:** So how would you translate that into English without the pronouns?

**Jeff:** For instance, one of the things that they’re doing is that they’re saying this. And the interesting thing is that there is not even a verb here. *“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.”*

**Ted:** It’s already working.

**Jeff:** It’s already working. The mystery of lawlessness is already working.

**Ted:** Only the one; only the. “One” is implied.

**Jeff:** And so (*Greek word*) is the restrainer. And that’s a nominative masculine singular.

**Kirk:** So it’s only “the.”

**Ted:** It’s like “the,” implying “the something.”

**Kirk:** So even the word “the” from the English point of view would still imply a person.

**Ted:** Well, not necessarily.

**Jeff:** I’m happy to say “he.” The question you still have to answer is, who is that he? It’s still an interpretive problem. Is it the Holy Spirit? Is it He? Is it another figure, like an emperor and so on?

**Kirk:** It just seems from my view—and I’m trying to understand here—I’m just trying to understand when you say that it’s the law, whether it’s the moral law of God or even civil law for that matter restraining as you had mentioned, if that were the case I would have expected Paul to be more specific. They seem to understand what Paul meant; I think that goes without saying, because with Paul from our perspective there’s no question.

**Jeff:** Yeah. But if you’re not specific about the position I’m taking—which I don’t think he is—he’s not specific about another position either. That’s what I’m saying. So wherever you land, it’s interpretive. Yes?

**John:** Maybe these two things go together. The law exists because there’s a Law giver. We call Him God, right?

**Jeff:** Yes.

**John:** So He, as He expresses Himself in coming to earth as a Man, would insist that the moral law is His character, and natural law is His character. So we can put those things together in a concept, with the fact that the law is a Person, meaning an eternal Being from which all these things come.

**Jeff:** And that’s a good revision. Maybe instead of saying “law” I need to say, because I described the natural law as being God’s law and the moral code being God’s law, that He is the God who gives the law. Maybe that would be a little more to the point.

**Kirk:** That would still imply then that it would be God would be the One restraining.

**Jeff:** Right; that’s right.

**Kirk:** Because He’s the Giver of the moral law.

### ***“The Parousia of God” Pt 3***

**Jeff:** That’s right. And so let’s say the natural law is in view.

**Kirk:** Okay.

**Jeff:** That has to be applied. And it’s not applied by God per se, right? That should be applied via the magistrate. So you could even say who is he? Is he the civil magistrate who applies that law?

**Kirk:** How do we understand natural law here? I kind of think that natural law is what God has instilled in our hearts. We make laws based upon that. But if we’re suppressing that law, suppressing the truth, then we’re going to replace the laws that God had already put in our hearts, and we’re going to create laws that are contrary. So when you talk about natural law it’s coming from the humans.

**Ted:** Well, it’s coming from nature, the nature of things.

**Jeff:** It is written on the heart of man, because man is part of that creation. Now I need to step back and say that when you look at natural law it wouldn’t just say “man.” But I would say the nature of the created order.

So for instance, man in and of himself can suppress his own idea of justice. But he can’t escape the nature: that the world is meant to be a just world.

**Kirk:** But it can be subverted; it can be twisted.

**Jeff:** Mm-hmm. I mean, a man can say, “I don’t think there’s any such thing as private property.” He can say that. But as soon as anybody takes something that’s his, he’ll be all exercised about it. So he can’t keep the nature of things from affecting his own thinking when it touches him.

**Ted:** I think I like the way the Roman Catholic Church handles homosexuality, because you can point to the Scriptures against it. Well yes, those are true. But it’s actually a natural law problem.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** They call it a disorder.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** It’s disordered from the natural order of things.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Ted:** I like that answer.

**Jeff:** I like natural law.

**Ted:** Do you want to become a Catholic?

**Jeff:** I don’t like any more than that. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** *Rome Sweet Home.*

**Jeff:** No!

**Don Maurer:** *Sola fide, sola gratia, sola Deo Gloria!*

**Jeff:** Go ahead, Don.

**Don Maurer:** In all fairness to those who believe that it is the Holy Spirit, I can understand what you’re saying about how people can be saved. But isn’t that kind of what God is doing now? I mean, look at the judgment upon this country, the insanity of denying male and female, signing “homosexual marriage” into law, etc. That’s taking the restraint off of things.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Yes, for sure.

**John:** And they think they have the divine power to change the definitions of law and justice.

### ***“The Parousia of God” Pt 3***

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** And that’s not true. And so the man of lawlessness is creating chaos against what is law. (*Unclear*) Why do people love that? Because they want to be free of those things that they don’t like. But it doesn’t change the reality.

**Jeff:** Yes. We’ll start with the next chapter next time. But one of the things that I was going to say later and mention is how this creeps into the church. Ligonier sends out a report every year; it’s a state of theology report. And one of the things that I noticed in that report this year was that the idea of gender identity used to be more firmly fixed in the church. And now people who are in the church are questioning the idea of gender identity. And so as the culture bombards the church, it has a way of seeping into the church.

**Kirk:** That happens as the church ceases to teach and preach the word of God.

**Jeff:** Yes, that’s right. Okay. I gotta roll; you guys gotta roll.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for this day. We pray that You’ll bless us. And Lord, we ask that Your hand would be upon us for good, that You would forgive our sins, that You would commend us to others. Most of all, Father, we ask that You will help us to be conformed not to this world, but to be conformed in Your word. Bless us, Lord, as we go out into this world. Help us to make an impact on it for the gospel and for the glory of Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.