



DISCOVERING REVELATION

The Coming of the Lawless One

It's important to know what the antichrist power of Bible prophecy represents, but it is also essential for us to understand what it will do to deceive us. Fortunately, the Bible clearly lays out where we can expect the antichrist to strike. In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul lays out a short timeline of events that must take place prior to the Second Coming. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 Paul says that Christ will not come until two specific things happen: (1) a great falling away—or apostasy—among Christians, and (2) the antichrist power appears on planet earth, claiming to stand in God's place.

In verse 7, Paul then goes on to say that the “mystery of iniquity doth already work.” In other words, the deceptions of the antichrist were already at play back in Paul's day. The stage was being set. This is a *very* important clue as to where we should watch for the antichrist to strike. The word *iniquity*, if you were to translate it literally from the Greek language, would read *lawlessness*.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-4, Paul gives us a startling picture of the last days. People will be living in a *lawless* world, where the motto is, “Do whatever you want, live however you please, as long as it feels good. Anything is acceptable, as long as you can justify it!” In other words, there is no such thing as absolute truth. There is no such thing as a moral standard.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that behavior really *does* matter. He particularly addresses those who “work *iniquity*,” which again means *lawlessness* (Greek: *anomia*). The startling thing about this passage is that Jesus isn't addressing atheists—He is speaking to people who call Him Lord!

What is sin? 1 John 3:4 tells us that sin is the *transgression of the law*. Some people insist that the law was only for the Old Testament—but you can't deny that we still have sin in our world today. And if sin exists, then there must still be a law that people break.

Some will protest: “But if you try to keep God's law, then you're trying to earn your way to heaven! That's Old Testament theology.” Of course, Acts 4:12 makes it clear that Jesus is our only path to heaven. Ephesians 2:8, 9 explains that we are saved by grace through faith—not by anything we can do. You can't keep God's law enough to pay for your sins—only the blood of Christ can do that. Nobody has ever been saved by keeping the law—not even in the Old Testament. Romans 4:2, 3 makes it clear, for example, that Abraham was saved by faith, not by keeping God's law. In Habbakuk 2:4—an *Old Testament* book—we read that “the just shall live by his faith.” Yet Genesis 26:5 also makes it clear that Abraham kept God's law, anyway!

The law still applies, yet the Bible teaches that something changed at the cross. What was it? It wasn't the method of salvation, that's for sure. We have always been saved by grace. In the Old Testament, there were primarily two kinds of law: (1) The Ten Commandments, or the *moral* law, and (2) the law of Moses, which had to do with ceremonies and rituals—the *ceremonial* law.

The *ceremonial* law consisted of regulations for sacrifices and other rituals. These all pointed forward to Jesus

Christ and what He would accomplish for us at the cross of Calvary. But the sacrificial animals never actually saved anybody (see Hebrews 10:4). They were just symbols pointing forward to Christ, and when He came we didn't need them anymore. After the cross, we didn't need the *ceremonial law* anymore.

But the *moral law*—the Ten Commandments—still stands. It is still wrong to murder, to lie and to commit adultery. It is still a sin to take God's name in vain or to worship an idol. We sin when we transgress, or break, this law (1 John 3:4). Jesus Himself said that the moral law still applies to Christians in Matthew 5:17-19. "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled," He said. In fact, the Bible declares that people who claim to know God but refuse to keep His commandments are lying! (See 1 John 2:3, 4; 3:2, 3)

God's moral law is important to Him, because it is a picture of what He is like. It is a description of His character. When God says, "You shall not murder," for example, He is saying, "You shall value life as I value life." Perhaps this is why Satan hates God's moral law so much, and why he makes it a special point of attack.

There is no question that the moral law still applies to Christians. The Bible is clear on this point. Just take a look at passages like Hebrews 10:16, 17, which tell us that God writes His laws in a Christian's heart! 1 John 2:3, 4 tells us that those who say they love God but refuse to keep His commandments are liars. Revelation 14:12 defines a "saint" as someone who keeps God's commandments.

And yet current surveys reveal that as many as 87 percent of Christians don't believe that God's moral laws are all that important anymore. The mystery of lawlessness is spreading! Satan hates the law of God because it shows him as a murderer and a liar. Revelation 12:17 shows us that the "dragon" (Satan) is particularly angry with those who "keep God's commandments."

The dragon has created confusion over a number of Bible texts to try to lead Christians away from God's moral requirements. For example, some people quote Romans 3:28 trying to prove that you don't have to keep the law. This verse simply says that we cannot be *justified* by the law. In other words, keeping it won't pay for your sins. Only the blood of Christ can do that. If these same people would only read down a few verses to Romans 3:31, they would see this: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

Some will still protest, stating that Romans 6:14 teaches that we are not "under the law, but under grace." This is true, but it doesn't excuse us from keeping God's Ten Commandments! When Christ forgave us, He took away the penalty of the law (the wages of sin is death) from us. We are no longer under the law—but that doesn't give us a license to go on sinning all we want! In fact, Romans 6:15 (the very next verse) makes this abundantly clear: "Shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid." Romans 6:1, 2 emphasizes this point. Christ's forgiveness is not a license to sin. It removes the penalty of sin from us (so that we are no longer under the *condemnation* of the law) and gives us eternal life (placing us under grace).

Paul points out that we are not free to sin all we want so that we can get more grace! Our behavior as Christians counts for something. James 1:23-25 calls God's moral law the "perfect law of liberty" and tells us that the law is like a mirror. It shows us our true condition. We are sinful. It drives us to the cross of Christ for cleansing. Psalm 19:7, 11 confirms this, telling us that the law leads us to conversion and warns us about the sin in our lives. Romans 7:7 says the same thing—the law warns us of our sin and makes us realize how badly we need Christ!

No wonder Paul wrote, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12). The law drives us to the cross, where the blood of Christ covers our sins. That should make us eternally grateful, and all the more willing to keep the law! There is a good reason the devil hates the law and the antichrist works against it—the law drives us to Jesus.

So why do Christians keep the commandments? Because it saves them? No. (We may not be saved by keeping the law, but we certainly won't be saved by breaking it, either. Those who don't keep it don't really know God! 1 John 2:3, 4) So why do they keep them? Because they love Jesus.

"If you love Me," said Jesus, "keep My commandments" (John 14:15).