

Mystery of Lawlessness

2 Thessalonians 2:7—10

Paul has been laying out the events of Israel's future prophetic program to assure the Thessalonians that they had not missed out on the Rapture and that they were not going through the Tribulation. Paul had previously told them what was going to happen at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13—18), then contrasted that with the events that would follow, specifically the Tribulation and the glorious Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 5:1—4). Most of Christendom blends these two distinct periods of time into one confusing mass because they filter the plain Scripture through the traditions of men. Out of perhaps 150 men considered to be early "church fathers," you can count on one hand those who taught a pretribulation Rapture. This is not really surprising, since even while Paul was alive, those who had embraced his teaching were falling away. At the end of his life, all those in Asia had left Paul's teaching (2 Timothy 1:15).

This is why it is so important to follow Scripture and not the writings of man. Most of these so-called church fathers had disregarded the doctrine of the Rapture because they failed to see Paul's distinct Mystery revelation. Most of Christendom accept the teachings of these "men of God" above the clear teaching of Scripture. Satan uses these traditions of men to lead people away from God's Word.

Mystery of iniquity (verse 7)

When Paul wrote this, the mystery of iniquity was already at work. It appears that this mystery of iniquity is being restrained at this moment, in this Dispensation of Grace. Being restrained does not mean that it is being held in abeyance. Satan's activities are being throttled but he is still able to carry out much of what he wants to accomplish.

Man is more than willing to carry out Satan's desires. This isn't surprising, since each human is born with a heart that is evil, wicked and ungodly (Jeremiah 17:1—10; Romans 3:10—18). The mystery of iniquity is personified in anyone who is ungodly, and the ungodly are those who have rejected Jesus Christ as their Savior. Scripture describes these people as false prophets and deceitful workers who appear to others as Christ's apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13—15). Satan is the one blinding the eyes of the unsaved so they will not be able to see the light of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3—4).

Mystery of godliness

In contrast to the mystery of iniquity is the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16). The mystery of iniquity is focused on unbelievers and the work of Satan in their lives while the mystery of godliness is focused on believers and the work of Christ in their lives. God manifests Himself through His Body, which is the church composed of believers in this Age of Grace. Paul mentions this mystery of godliness in 2 Corinthians 4:10—11 when he says that the life of Jesus is made manifest in his body through persecution as he preached the gospel.

It appears that this same manifestation of Christ through the Body of Christ is in view in 1 Timothy 3:16 where Paul says that Christ was manifest in the flesh. Most people try to fit Jesus Christ into this passage, but there are problems when this is done. Saying Jesus Christ was justified (declared righteous) in the Spirit would indicate He needed justification. Only sinners need to be justified. There also seems to be a problem with stating that Jesus Christ was preached unto the Gentiles. When Jesus was on this earth we see him specifically NOT going to

the Gentiles (Matthew 10:5). Later, Jesus gives His Disciples the commandment to go into the whole world and preach the Gospel (of the Kingdom) (Matthew 28:19—20). However, they were to do this in a specific manner by beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to the whole world (Acts 1:8). The Disciples (who were commissioned to act in the place of Jesus) are shown to have stayed in Jerusalem, because they never accomplished the task of conveying the leadership of Israel. In other words, Jesus never did preach unto the Gentiles.

This passage, in 1 Timothy 3:16, actually fits the Body of Christ much better. First, notice that Paul is talking about a mystery, something that had not been revealed until Paul writes it down. Second, we in the Body of Christ manifest Christ through what we do (see above). Third, we have been justified in the Spirit when we were saved. All those in the Body of Christ have been justified, or declared righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21). Fourth, angels are watching and observing us (1 Corinthians 4:9). According to Ephesians 3:10, principalities and powers (the spirit world) learn about the manifold wisdom of God by observing members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Our Apostle Paul was raised up to go specifically to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:6; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7). Very seldom are Jesus and His Disciples even seen talking with a Gentile. We in the church are to take God's message of reconciliation to the whole world (2 Corinthians 5:18—19), something Peter and the 11 Disciples never did. The Apostle Paul is, however, said to have taken this Gospel to the whole world (Colossians 1:5—6; Romans 16:25—26).

Finally, 1 Timothy 3:16 says received up into glory. Again, most people think of Jesus Christ ascending up into heaven as the Disciples see Him being caught up into the clouds. In context, this would refer to the Church, the Body of Christ. The objection would be made that it appears this was an action that happened in the past so it must be speaking of Jesus, and not to a future Rapture of the church. Keep in mind that we are talking about the mystery of godliness. Christ death, burial and resurrection are all set forth in prophecy so they certainly could not be considered something unrevealed. Scripture once again gives the answer, for Ephesians says we are already seen by God as having been (past tense) seated in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), and Romans 8:29—30 shows that we are already glorified. This passage in 1 Timothy 3:16 shows us so secure in Christ that we are pictured as already having been received up into glory.

The Lawless one (verses 8—10)

The last lesson highlighted the person of the antichrist, who will masquerade as the true Messiah, and cause Israel to believe he is the Messiah through many signs and wonders (Revelation 13:13—14). Verse 8 gives the short biography of the man of sin, beginning with his rise to power all the way to his demise. He is revealed at the beginning of the Tribulation when he makes a treaty with, or concerning, Israel. When Jesus Christ returns in power to rule over the world, He will conquer the antichrist by slaying him with the breath of His mouth. The antichrist is shown to have a fatal wound in Revelation 13:3—4 and then brought back to life by Satan. Many believe Satan will do this by some slight of hand. However, with the understanding that the Holy Spirit is no longer restraining him, he will be able to perform great and powerful signs and wonders, making it appear that the resurrection will be genuine.

Although the antichrist survives his fatal wound (rises from the dead as Jesus Christ already did), the end of the Tribulation brings Armageddon and the antichrist (false beast) and false prophet are seized and thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will exist for all eternity.

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