

Identifying The Restrainer Holding Back The Antichrist

By Robert I. Adams

In this article, we are going to focus on what the apostle Paul taught about the appearance of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2. Here follows the passage we are going to look at:

“And now you know what is restraining, that he [the man of sin – v.3] may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.” (vv.6, 7)

Paul indicates here there is a restraining force that keeps the Antichrist from appearing on the world scene. The question we will be looking at is - what is actually restraining the Antichrist?

Some assert that the church is restraining the Antichrist. From this it is assumed that the church will be “taken out of the way,” i.e. transferred to heaven before the Antichrist appears. We will look at this opinion in the light of the following points:

When Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica about “He who now restrains,” the context shows he was referring to something they knew about, but evidently it was not a direct reference to the church itself. The universal church, including the local church at Thessalonica, could not have been restraining the Antichrist because Paul was reminding the church that the Antichrist had not yet appeared, thus proving that “the day of Christ” had not yet come (2 Thess. 2:2, 3). Since Paul is saying that the Antichrist will be a sign for the believers, they cannot be transferred to heaven before he appears.

Secondly, Paul would be contradicting himself if the church is restraining the Antichrist. He makes it clear that “the lawless one” will be revealed before Christ comes (2 Thess. 2:2, 3) and will be destroyed when Christ comes (v.8). Paul also makes it clear that the church will be gathered to Christ precisely when He comes (2 Thess. 2:1). Note that Paul gives no indication that Christ will come back twice. The order of events will therefore be as follows:

1. “He” who is restraining is “taken out of the way.”
2. The Antichrist appears.
3. The coming of Christ and the gathering of the church to Him.
4. The Antichrist is destroyed by Christ.

Consequently, the church will be present also after the restrainer is "taken out of the way."

We learn from Paul's letter to the believers in Thessalonica that they knew what was restraining the Antichrist. In 2 Thessalonians 2:6 we read: "And now you know what is restraining." We however, cannot be absolutely certain about what it is because we are simply not told. Personally though, I think there are several things that suggest it is the Holy Spirit. In the original Greek text the word for 'spirit,' pneuma, is grammatically neuter, but is sometimes rendered as masculine (i.e. "He") when used of the Holy Spirit (e.g. John 16:13; 1 Peter 1:11). Therefore "what" is used in verse 6 ("you know what is restraining"), and "He" in verse 7 ("He who now restrains"). That the Holy Spirit restrains individuals is illustrated in Acts 16:7, where Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not permitted by the Holy Spirit to go into Bithynia.

The last part of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 says: "He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way." Some expositors assert that the phrase "taken out of the way" means 'to go to heaven,' and they say that since the church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the church must go to heaven together with the Holy Spirit before the Antichrist can be revealed. When assessing this idea we need to take a closer look at the expression "taken out of the way" in the original text. It literally says, 'comes from the midst.' The formulation in Greek implies separation or movement away from something. It can therefore be translated variously as: "is out of the way" (Contemporary English Version, English Standard Version, Jewish New Testament), "be out of the way" (Young's Literal Translation), or "steps out of the way" (New Living Translation). This does not imply that the Holy Spirit is going to leave the earth, but that He will no longer restrain the Antichrist when the time comes for his appearance.

We conclude that 2 Thessalonians 2:6 & 7 do not imply that the Holy Spirit and the church will be transferred to heaven before the Antichrist is revealed. What is implied is that the Antichrist cannot be revealed before God allows it, "that he may be revealed in his own time" (2 Thess. 2:6). The Antichrist will be unable to 'step forward' until the Holy Spirit 'steps aside.'

In case you have some queries about this, I have compiled answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Bible's teaching on the return of Jesus in my book "The Approaching Apocalypse" (also available in e-book format). You are welcome to look at it at [Amazon](#). You are also welcome to view my book/e-book "The Unveiling", which is all about the book of Revelation - also available at [Amazon](#).

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