



#11 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).

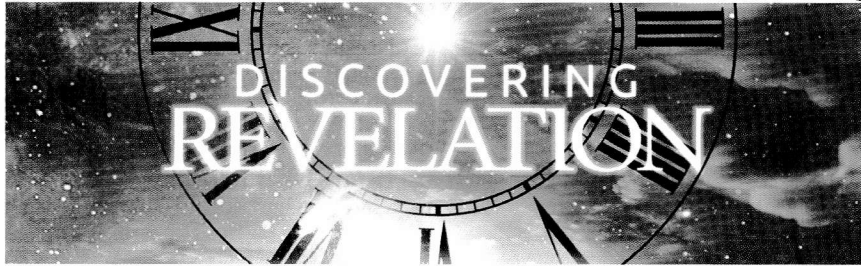
Paul points out that we are not free to sin all we want so that we can get more grace! Our behavior as Christians counts for something. James 1:23-25 calls God's moral law the "perfect law of liberty" and tells us that the law is like a mirror. It shows us our true condition. We are sinful. It drives 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).

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If you're a sports fan, you've seen a coach arguing with an official about a close call—for example, whether his player was out of bounds when he caught the ball. But have you ever seen a coach argue that it didn't matter that his player caught the ball out of bounds? That his player shouldn't have to follow the rules?

We all understand that it's not possible to play a game unless everyone agrees on the rules and that all the players must follow them. Otherwise, it's just chaos.

But in the religious world, we often hear people say that rules aren't important. They say that, this side of the cross, God has done away with His rules—His law—and that those who try to keep them are legalists who are trying to earn heaven!

What about it? Is God's law still important for Christians?

LAWLESSNESS IN THE LAST DAYS

1. How does the Bible describe conditions on earth in the last days?
(2 Timothy 3:1-5)

The last days are perilous times, because people will be living without regard to God. It is a time of lawlessness.

2. According to the Apostle Paul, what two things must take place before Jesus' second coming? (2 Thessalonians 2:1-9)
 - (a) unless the _____ away comes first (vs. 3)
 - (b) the _____ will be revealed (vs. 8)

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Paul predicts a "falling away" among Christians before Jesus returns. Many will turn away from God. He also says that "the man of sin" ("the lawless one") will be revealed. In verse 7, Paul states that this "mystery of lawlessness" was already at work in his own day. The stage was already being set for the perilous times of lawlessness that would characterize conditions on earth just before Jesus returns.

DOES IT REALLY MATTER IF WE FOLLOW GOD'S RULES?

3. What does Jesus say is required in order to enter the kingdom of heaven? (**Matthew 7:21**)

It's easy to claim to be a Christian; it's much more difficult to live as a Christian. To those who profess to follow Him, but who do not do His will, Jesus says, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (**Matthew 7:23**)

4. What does the Bible say about those who claim to know God yet do not obey His commandments? (**1 John 2:4-6**)

Obedience to God's commandments really is important. The Bible is clear. God wants us to obey Him and His law. (**Hebrews 5:9; Matthew 19:17**)

NO ONE CAN EARN SALVATION BY OBEYING THE LAW

5. Who is the only source of salvation for all sinful humanity? (**Acts 4:12**)

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6. How are men and women saved from sin? (**Ephesians 2:8, 9**)

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7. Can a person be saved from sin by his or her faithful obedience to God's law? (**Romans 3:20**)

No matter how carefully we try to obey God's law, we can never earn salvation through our obedience. Salvation is God's free gift of grace. It comes only through Jesus Christ when we accept Him as our Savior by faith. No one has ever been saved by keeping God's law. Only the blood of Jesus saves us from sin.

WAS GOD'S TEN COMMANDMENT LAW ABOLISHED AT THE CROSS?

8. How does the Bible define sin? (1 John 3:4)

Sin is lawlessness—breaking God's law. If God's Ten Commandment law was done away with at the cross, then there could be no sin. You can't break the rules of a game if there are no rules. The fact that there is still sin in our world tells us that God's law is still in place. He still expects us to do His will as spelled out in the Ten Commandments.



9. How long did Jesus say God's law would continue? (Matthew 5:17, 18)

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10. Does God's grace do away with His law? (Romans 3:31)

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11. What does Paul say was “nailed” to Jesus’ cross when He died? (Colossians 2:13-17)

Verse 14: “having wiped out the _____ of requirements”

Verse 17: “which are a shadow of _____ to come”

Verse 17 identifies the law Paul is referring to in this passage of Scripture. It refers to those laws “which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament sacrificial service pointed forward to Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” Those laws ended with His death, because they had served their purpose. Jesus had died as our Sacrifice, so there was no more need for animal sacrifices. The laws and ordinances of the sanctuary service ended at the cross.

However, God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, still applies. It's still a sin to lie, steal, kill or commit adultery. God still expects His children to keep His moral law.

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12. But doesn't the Bible say that Christians are not under the law, but under grace? (**Romans 6:14**)

Christians are under God's grace, but that doesn't excuse them from keeping God's Ten Commandment law. Paul makes this plain in the very next verse: "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:15) When Jesus forgives us, He takes us out from under the condemnation of the law and gives us eternal life, placing us under grace. But His forgiveness is not a license to disobey God's Ten Commandments.

OBEYING GOD'S LAW FOR THE RIGHT REASON

13. What is the reason we should obey God's commandments? (**John 14:15**)

We obey God's commandments, but we don't do so to earn salvation—that's not possible in any case. We obey His law because we love Him.

14. How does the Bible describe God's faithful people in the last days? (**Revelation 12:17**)

God's people in the final days of earth's history will be keeping His commandments. His law will be written in their hearts (Hebrews 10:16, 17), and they will obey Him because they love Him.

MY DECISION

- Jesus, I love You, and I want to follow You by keeping Your commandments. I ask You to live out Your will in me each day.

MY PRAYER

Father, thank You for the gift of eternal life in Your Son, Jesus. Help me to demonstrate my love for You by faithfully obeying You in all things. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.