

A Commentary on

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4

by Gary H. Patterson

“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, (2) not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. (3) Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, (4) who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

If you had never read this passage of Scripture before and never heard or claimed any of the popular teachings concerning the rapture of the Church, what would you conclude about it, taking it at face value? Did you know that such an unbiased and childlike approach is what God requires for us to understand anything about Him? Listen to what Jesus said:

“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have *hidden* these things from the wise and prudent and have *revealed* them to babes. (26) Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight (Mt. 11:25-26). The Apostle Paul expounds: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned [not concluded with human reason]” (1 Cor. 2:14).

Biblical interpretation should never be approached as if it has some hidden meaning that only the “well-studied” or “qualified” can figure out. You can be so “well-studied” in Scripture that you miss the simple and plain-sense meaning. Yes, we must study to show ourselves approved, being accurate in knowledge and true to the Scriptural and historical context, however, listening to God should be central to that study and not the exercise of human reason. It is an exercise in futility when we seek for a meaning in Scripture that is not there or assume what we are attempting to prove (begging the question). When we arrive at conclusions on this basis, we mislead people and cause them to boast in us and not in God. As Jesus, said, “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory” (Jn. 7:18).

I would be quite perplexed as to how anyone can conclude from this passage in 2 Thessalonians that the Church will be “raptured” before the “man of sin is revealed” without understanding the thinking and forces behind it. It is easy to see how so many would avoid the plain and obvious truth. If we are already dogmatically standing on the shifting sands of an eschatological theory, any Scripture passages that would seem to threaten our false sense of ease would have to be customized. Much is at stake, especially, the pride of many major Bible teachers and ministries. Many leaders of the mainstream Church would have to humble themselves and admit they have misled many people. It is much easier on our egos to spend time painstakingly attempting to prove that we are right than to admit we are wrong when we are.

Humility can cost us far more than we want to pay. We must decide which is more valuable to us, our reputation before men or God? To humble oneself in such a case could mean loss of reputation, popularity, prestige, and revenue for many churches and major ministries. It could mean the complete end of some ministries at least in their present state and the disposal of many popular books. This is what makes popular doctrinal error so addictive and dangerous. So, much of the mainstream Church in America has a decision to make, to humble herself and be exalted before God, possibly losing face with many sources of revenue, or save face and become less popular with God. Is not God our source and provider anyway? We must honor God to our hurt. He has already done the same for us through Christ who bore the shame and reproach of the cross.

Now let us look at the plain-sense meaning of the 2 Thessalonians 2 texts.

Paul’s main topic:

- 1.) “Concerning the coming of our Lord and our gathering together to Him” (v.1). This obviously describes one event that includes one action and a result of that action: The Lord’s coming (the action) and our consequent gathering together to Him (the result of that action). Paul’s use of “concerning” identifies the subject matter he is addressing: “the coming of our Lord and our gathering together to Him.”
 - ↪ Paul continues his exhortation and encourages them not to be troubled concerning some notion that this event had already taken place. To make things simpler, and while staying true to his original line of thought, He synonymously truncates the name of this event by referring to it as *the day of Christ* (v.2; obviously not referring to a literal day but a time allotted by God for this event).
 - ↪ Two other references (Php. 1:10; 2:16) to *the day of Christ* support this day being the same as “the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him.” Paul states: “...that you may be sincere and without offense till the *day of Christ*,” and “so that I may rejoice in the *day of Christ* that I have not

run in vain or labored in vain.” Replace “the day of Christ” with “the coming of the Lord and our gathering together to Him” in all of these instances and the same meaning is conveyed.

- ☞ Matthew 24:30-31 depicts this same event: “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (31) And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will *gather together* His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (See also 1 Th. 4:16-17).

The plain-sense conclusions:

- 1.) It is a solid fact: Paul was writing concerning the coming of our Lord and our gathering unto Him.
- 2.) His use of the “day of Christ” and “that day” has to, therefore, be referring to this event *because Paul did not indicate otherwise*, and other Scripture texts support this idea. It’s that simple.
 - ☞ Imagine that you agreed with a friend to come to their house soon to have a meal. Then you stated in that context that the day would have to be Monday evening. Your friend prepares a meal and awaits your arrival on Monday evening but you do not show up. Your explanation for not coming is that your friend misunderstood what you said and that your reference to Monday evening was concerning something completely different. It is no surprise that your friend is not only perplexed but also a little disgruntled with you. You then proceed to explain to your friend how incompetent they are in their ability to understand your veiled intentions. Are you confused yet? This is the nonsensical approach many are taking to interpret 2 Th. 2:1-4. Did the Holy Spirit move through Peter, James, John, Paul, and others to write Scripture in a way that would confuse or perplex His own people—that only experts can decipher? Well, you know the answer to that.
- 3.) Since all this is true, the teaching of the *imminent*¹ return of Christ by the majority of the American Church has no Biblical basis. The teaching of the

¹ Indicates that it can happen at any time independent of conditions

*inevitable*² return of Christ does. Scripture passages that are said to support an imminence viewpoint are actually indicating an inevitable return of Christ. The unveiling of the man of sin and the great falling away must take place before “the coming of our Lord and our gathering together to Him.”

Could the popular Church majority be wrong about this? Yes, and have also been (and are) wrong about other doctrinal issues because misguided and inflated human reasoning and bias has displaced lowly spiritual common-sense.

4.) Other proof (from Matthew 24)

- ☞ Read Matthew 24 for yourself and note how many times Jesus referenced phrases such as “when you see,” “you will hear,” and similar statements to “know this.” Jesus’ use of these indicates that the future leaders of His Church could be present to see, hear, and know the signs or indicators of His coming and the gathering of the saints. This reveals they could be present on earth to see them. Since Christ did not return in that generation, they did not see, hear, or know all the things spoken by Him. Because of this, there are still signs that we, this generation, are to look for that would precede His coming. This would make the rapture of the Church inevitable but not imminent.
- ☞ Someone will respond with: “Matthew 24 is referring to the second coming of Christ and not the rapture of the Church.” My response: Jesus clearly indicated that the twelve apostles *could*, indeed, be present to see all the signs of His second coming, which means they would miss the rapture according to the pretribulational rapture theory. The second coming and the rapture would therefore have to be the same progressive event. Besides, Jesus’ disciples were the only ones present when He spoke these things. Matthew 24:1-1 makes this quite clear: “Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and HIS DISCIPLES came up to show him the buildings of the temple. (2) And JESUS SAID TO THEM, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”” Oh, what a tangled web we weave!
- ☞ Someone may respond with: “The gathering of the elect by the angels in Matthew 24 is solely referring to the Christian Jews.” My response: What hat did you pull that rabbit out of? The use of the word “elect” throughout

² Indicates that it will happen, is inescapable, and will be heralded by certain signs

Scripture always refers to both Jew and Gentile believers unless otherwise indicated.

- ➦ Obviously, historically speaking, Israel had to be reunited as a nation before the day of Christ, thus making an absurdity any notion that the early Church taught a doctrine of Christ's imminent return. Because Israel became a nation before the rapture of the Church, this occurrence would therefore support Scripture, make it an actual part of God's end-time order, and serve as a sign that would precede the rapture.

Conclusion

Do you now see how the devil has blinded much of the Church with a "smokescreen" of nonsensical persuasive words and end-time doctrine that is nothing more than the skillful manipulation of Scripture? What more can be said? Scripture was not written for the "experts." It was written for the "babes." God is most brilliant in so many ways.

Read these related articles also:

- ➦ [Will the Messiah Return this Coming Jubilee Year?](#)
- ➦ [Early Church Fathers and the Rapture](#)

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