

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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The Man of Lawlessness and the Antichrist

Many, if not most, commentaries and works on Bible prophecy equate the Man of Lawlessness in **II Thessalonians Chapter 2** with the antichrist of John's epistles. Often this is done without any justification at all. Others may provide some justification for this conclusion. It is the relationship between these two things that we want to explore here.

Let's begin by quoting everything the Bible actually says about the antichrist and the Man of Lawlessness. There are only a few verses that discuss each of them.

ANTICHRIST

"18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us...22 Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son." **I John 2:18-19, 22** (NKJV)

"And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you

have heard was coming, and is now already in the world." **I John 4:3** (NKJV)

"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." **II John 7** (NKJV)

The antichrist is not mentioned at all in Revelation or anywhere else but the five verses above. These five verses are all the Bible has to say about the antichrist.

MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

"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...6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 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. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love

of the truth, that they might be saved." **II Thessalonians 2:3-4,6-10** (NKJV)

The Man of Lawlessness is not mentioned at all in Revelation or anywhere else but the seven verses above. These seven verses are all the Bible has to say about the Man of Lawlessness.

If it be objected that the Bible has much more to say about one or both of these but just with different names, it must first be established that these are really referring to the same thing. It cannot simply be assumed that there are a number of aliases for these two that are used throughout the Scripture. That needs to be proven, not merely asserted.

It first needs to be stated that there are certainly similarities between them. However, two things can have any number of things in common and still be different. That is why we talk about comparing apples to oranges. Both are fruits that are more or less round which grow in trees and are good for food. However, despite their similarities, they are certainly not the same thing. Both cats and dogs are furry animals with four legs, two ears, a tail, etc. that people own as pets. However, everyone knows that they are very different animals.

There is no doubt that both the Man of Lawlessness and the antichrist are both wicked and do the work of the devil. They are both enemies of God and His people. They also have a

number of characteristics in common. However, it does not automatically follow from that that they are exactly the same. When we look more closely at the descriptions of them, we do see some differences between them.

Here we are going to compare and contrast the Man of Lawlessness and the antichrist. Then we will draw some conclusions about their relationship to one another. While this is not a thorough discussion of either one, it should be sufficient to better understand how they relate to one another.

COMPARED

1. Both are part of an apostasy. That is, they come out from God's people. The Man of Lawlessness comes out of a great falling away or apostasy, **II Thess. 2:3**. John said the antichrists went out from among us but were not of us, **I John 2:19**.
2. Both are liars and deal in deception. Paul said the Man of Lawlessness uses lying wonders and causes people to believe a lie, **II Thess. 2:9-12**. John said the antichrist is a liar and a deceiver, **I John 2:22, II John 7**.
3. Both work against God and His people. Paul said the Man of Lawlessness opposes all that is called God, **II Thess. 2:4**. The very name "antichrist" indicates that he works in opposition to Christ.
4. The ideas and attitudes of both were already working in the time of the apostles. Paul said the mystery of lawlessness was already at work, **II Thess. 2:7**. John said there were already many antichrists, **I John 2:18**.
5. Both deny that God is God. Paul said the Man of Lawlessness exalts himself above all that is called God or worshipped, **II Thess. 2:4**. John said the antichrist denies that Jesus is the Christ and that He came in the flesh, **I John 2:22, 4:3, II John 7**.
6. Both want to take the place of God. Paul said the Man of Lawlessness sits as God in the

temple showing himself that he is God, **II Thess. 2:4**. The very name "antichrist" can mean "instead of or in the place of Christ". Think of anti-pasta as meaning a substitute for pasta. There was even an anti-pope that stood opposed to and in the place of the Pope as a substitute.

CONTRASTED

1. There are many antichrists but only one Man of Lawlessness. Paul only spoke of the Man of Lawlessness in the singular. John said there are many antichrists, **I John 2:18** and indicated that anyone who denied that Jesus came in the flesh was an antichrist, **I John 4:3**. He said there were many deceivers that were antichrists, **II John 7**.

It might be objected that John never said there was no such thing as "the Antichrist" that was yet future in his day. That is true but it misses the point that I am making here. Whether or not John believed in a future Antichrist who would properly be called "the Antichrist", there were many antichrists in his time. Paul did not speak of many men of lawlessness in his time.

2. The Man of Lawlessness was to come after a falling away and was yet to be revealed when **II Thessalonians** was written - while there were many antichrists already in John's day, **II Thess. 2:3, 8, I John 2:18, 4:3, II John 2**.
3. The Man of Lawlessness was being restrained in Paul's day, but the antichrists were not restrained in John's day, **II Thess. 2:7-8, I John 2:18-19, 4:3, II John 7**.
4. The Man of Lawlessness uses false miracles along with false teaching while the antichrist uses false teaching, **II Thess. 2:9, I John 2:22, 4:3, II John 7**.
5. It might also be noted that the antichrists went out from the Church while the Man of Lawlessness sits in the Church

(temple of God), **II Thess. 2:4, I John 2:19**. These sound like very different, even opposite things. However, I certainly believe that both things can be done at the same time. It was not that the antichrists had left Christianity altogether, they had just left the true Church. With the Man of Lawlessness sitting in the Church claiming to be God, it can hardly be called the true Church. Both are part of a corrupted church rather than the true Church.

CONCLUSIONS

How can there be so many similarities between these two and yet be such significant differences? If John believed in an antichrist that was future in his day that could be called "the Antichrist" wouldn't that be the same as the Man of Lawlessness? Are we just making things confusing by trying to distinguish between the two? What conclusions can we legitimately draw here?

1. There are many antichrists. The Gnostics, and those who proceeded full blown Gnosticism, were certainly antichrists. They denied that Jesus had come in the flesh. There are many individuals and groups of people who have denied or do deny that Jesus is the Christ or that He came in the flesh. That list is long but most of those on that list cannot properly be called the Man of Lawlessness.
2. It seems clear to me that the Man of Lawlessness satisfies the definition of antichrist. That is, the Man of Lawlessness is an antichrist.
3. However, saying the Man of Lawlessness is antichrist is not the same thing as saying every antichrist is the Man of Lawlessness. We know that all the antichrists in John's day were not, in fact, the Man of Lawlessness. The great apostasy had not happened, that which restrained him had not been removed, and he had not been revealed.

4. It seems to me that “antichrist” is a much more general term than “Man of Lawlessness”. The Man of Lawlessness certainly fits in the category of antichrist, but not every antichrist is the Man of Lawlessness.

So, are the Man of Lawlessness and the antichrist one and the same? The Man of Lawlessness is certainly an antichrist. However, there are many antichrists that are not the Man of Lawlessness. Furthermore, the ideas, concepts, and attitudes behind both were already working in the days of the apostles.

However, “antichrist” is a general term that refers to many individuals and groups of people including many in John’s day. “Man of Lawlessness” is a more specific term to refer to a specific antichrist that was to come after the apostasy and after that which restrained him was taken away. That antichrist will be destroyed by the coming of the Lord, **II Thess. 2:8**. Many other antichrists have already been destroyed prior to the Lord’s coming. Do not confuse a general term and a specific one by making them equal. They are closely related but that is not the same as equal.

FINAL NOTES

It should be noted that there is a relationship between the little horn of Daniel and the beast of Revelation to the Man of Lawlessness and the antichrist, as well. Those relationships deserve special studies of their own. However, that is beyond the scope of this study.

This is important because we need to understand and teach the Bible as accurately as possible. It is accurate to say that the Man of Lawlessness is an antichrist. However, it is not accurate to say that the antichrist is the Man of Lawlessness. Antichrist is a general term that fits many individuals and groups of people. The Man of Lawlessness is one instance of an antichrist. We need to be both clear and accurate in how we speak about these things.